

interzone

JANUARY 1999

Number 139

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**William Hope
Hodgson at
Eternity's
Gateway...**

**Two ghost
stories for
the season...**

and other new fiction, from

Brian Stableford

Darrell Schweitzer

Kim Newman

Alexander Glass

Tony Ballantyne

70TH ANNIVERSARY INTERVIEW WITH JACK WILLIAMSON



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Beyond The Pale



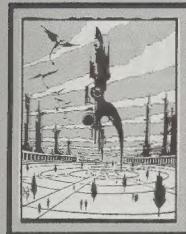
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interzone

science fiction & fantasy

JANUARY 1999

Number 139

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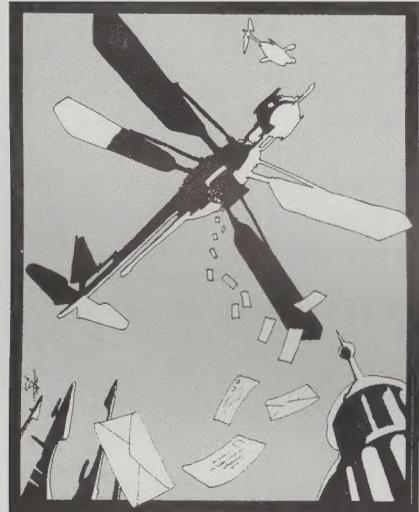


You'll have noticed a physical change with this issue of *Interzone*. We've gone for a somewhat different look, including a less-tall format and a new logo. The reasons for the slight change in size are twofold. Firstly, it brings the magazine into line with a great many other publications – for example *The New Scientist*, whose height and width are exactly the same as our new dimensions – and at the same time makes it easier to sell on magazine racks in America, where numerous periodicals – for example *The New Yorker* – are much smaller than our European A4 size (which in U.S. eyes appears strangely tall and

droopy). Secondly, it makes the magazine slightly less heavy for mailing purposes; since it tended to hover around the 150-gramme mark, sometimes fractionally above, sometimes below, our per-copy mailing costs used to fluctuate month to month. Now, with the shaving of a few millimetres off the height, we know in advance that it should remain safely beneath the postage-hike level of 150 grammes; and hence we save on mailing costs. Besides, the new format feels handier, in our opinion, and Paul Brazier's new logo looks clear and attractive. We hope that readers agree!

David Pringle

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by publishing books by Stephen Baxter? For that matter, why does Cobley think that publishers label novels as "science fiction" in the first place? "Sf" is a notoriously difficult term to define, but when it comes down to it, a book appears on the sf shelves if the publisher thinks they will maximize their sales by labelling it as such.

As one of the writers who has "given myself over to the meretricious process" of writing Doctor Who books, I've never understood quite why my novels and those of Paul Cornell, Kate Orman, Gareth Roberts and so on are automatically less "original" than the sub-Moorcock, sub-Tolkien, sub-Trek, sub-Heinlein, sub-Lensman, sub-Gibson efforts that make up the bulk of mainline sf. Just skimming the "Books Received" section of *Interzone* it's clear that most sf novels don't exactly "burn with their own visionary intensity." Science fiction has always fed upon itself and paid homage to or reacted against the "past masters."

Cobley seems to think that those of us writing Doctor Who novels are doing so because we lack the talent, or even the energy to do anything else. Looking at our CVs it's obvious that he's talking rubbish: most of us have other publications to our names, a lot of us have been snapped up by TV companies. We're writing Who books because we want to, not because we're incapable of doing better for ourselves.

I've never "laid claim to being new and fresh," but I write Doctor Who books because they are useful vehicles for what I have to say. There are advantages to working in a shared universe – there are a couple of characters in each book for whom the audience already have sympathy, there is a lot of background established. There's no philosophical difference between setting a novel in the Doctor Who universe or setting it on Discworld or in the Culture. Those working in universes of their own creation use stock types to establish audience identification: "seedy space trader," "everyman in a strange land," "bitter old astronaut," "young woman in man's world." As Paul Cornell noted in his interview, there's something more honest and resonant about using Captain Kirk in a Star Trek novel than a stock "ambitious starship captain" in a so-called "original" story.

With the Who books in particular, there are very few restrictions: I've written for four editors and two publishers now, and have never been forced to change anything to protect the "brand." My imagination and writing has been given free reign. Perhaps that only exposes my own lack of originality and ambition, but, if so, it's difficult to see how taking the Doctor Who logo off the cover would make me a better writer. There are some great sf books in the range: Matt Jones's *Beyond the Sun* and Ben

Dear Editors:

Mike Cobley's letter (issue 136, p5) conveniently recites a few of the standard arguments used against books that *Interzone* labels as "spinoffery." He levels the charge that books such as the Doctor Who range "are a marketing exercise designed to exploit a fanbase." Well... yes. It's a publisher's job to identify potential markets for a book. Virgin, and latterly the BBC, have proved that there are tens of thousands of people out there who will buy two Doctor Who books every month. What's the difference between that and "exploiting" people who want to buy a Stephen Baxter book

Aaronovitch's *The Also People* are homages to Le Guin and Iain M. Banks, but both – dare I say it? – transcend their source material; *Seeing I* by Kate Orman and Jon Blum and *Tragedy Day* by Gareth Roberts are fine satires; *Alien Bodies* by Lawrence Miles and *Blood Heat* by Jim Mortimore are good Doctor Who takes on sf ideas. In over a hundred books, there is an embarrassment of riches, from hard-sf and cyberpunk to Carry On-style historical romps. Not every book is brilliant – a few are awful – and not every book will be to everyone's taste, but there's more there than Cobley gives us credit for.

Dismissing "spinoffery" out of hand reeks of snobbery – exactly the same sort of prejudice that sf as a whole faces from the "mainstream." There are good and bad examples of spinoffery, just as there are good and bad examples of sf. Good spinoffery is better than bad non-spinoffery. Let's not forget that *Interzone* counted *The Time Ships* as spinoffery when it was released... or that Stephen Baxter originally considered submitting it as a Doctor Who novel.

Lance Parkin
Bubwith, York

Dear Editors:
Mike Moorcock's febrile rant of a letter (*IZ* 137) is just the latest twitchily defensive example of science fiction's curious love/hate relationship with so-called "middle-class culture."

First of all, I take issue with the notion that science fiction is not middle class in itself. It is an aspirational, outward-looking form which exhibits the view, even at its most dystopian, that we live in a Universe which can be changed through knowledge. This strikes me as an attitude with which middle class Victorians would have been in total accord, a view which still prevails in Western culture. Fantasy – or at least that parasitic literary form whose practitioners spend their time regurgitating Tolkien in brick-thick trilogies – is an aristocratic form, full of hierarchies and inexplicable magics which must be accepted without reason, like the authority of Church or State.

Of course, when Moorcock talks of "middle-class culture" he is referring to the coterie of black-clad metropolitan critics, pointedly not discussing science fiction on their unwatched late-night arts discussion programmes. The joke is that genre fiction writers, while professing contempt for such people and their institutions, would gladly enter into a pact with any Devil who could guarantee them a South Bank Show inter-

view in exchange for the loss of a few thousand readers. The snobbery is understandable – who wouldn't sooner be Artist than writer? – but none the less snobbery for that.

Adrian Fry
Swindon, Wiltshire

Dear Editors:

Interzone seems to be going from strength to strength: the proportion of outstanding stories is quite a bit higher this year. Issue 135 was a good example, with three very fine stories. I thought that Tanith Lee's "Jedella Ghost" was an excellent fable in the Shirley Jackson vein. Timons Esaia's "The Mars Convention" was head and shoulders above the usual "sf as the essence of human culture" story, witty and never taking itself too seriously. And I was impressed by the way John Whitbourn's "Allah, the Omnipotent?" presented a devout Muslim character sympathetically and knowledgeably (I also enjoyed Paul Brazier's interview with Whitbourn in the same issue).

On the issue of sf in translation, I think that *IZ* should certainly publish more of it, so long as it is as well written and translated as the stories that appeared in issue 133. It is unfortunate that English-speaking sf and fantasy publishers seem to take so little interest in what is going on outside the Anglophone world (the same with readers – but given the lack of interest on the part of publishers, we scarcely have a choice). Of course non-Anglophone writing doesn't always conform to our notions of what sf should be, but surely that gives us an opportunity to escape our provincialism, which is what sf and fantasy at their best are all about.

Finally, Greg Egan seems to have a curious notion of what autism is. It is not a mild limitation on one's ability to understand others – it is a radical inability to understand other minds. This is poignantly illustrated by a recent experiment in which children were shown an open Smarties tube with pencils rather than sweets inside. The top was put back on and they were asked what another child, not in the room when the tube was open, would think was inside. All the normal children said "Smarties." The autistic children said "Pencils." So I cannot imagine why anyone would wish to join his "Voluntary Autists" – it would be like a blind person refusing to have his or her cataracts removed because human sight can sometimes be subject to optical illusions. Our ability to empathize with other human beings is far from perfect, but without it human society

(not to mention fiction) would be impossible.

Jennifer Swift
Oxford

Dear Editors:

I find Mr Westfahl's column always interesting at least, if not occasionally thought-provoking. His "Did Alien Astronauts Make the Shroud of Turin?" falls into the former category. Nevertheless I would like to offer my bit to his final comparison between the stages of human development and of civilization.

I believe we go through two stages in our relationship with our parents. Firstly we look upon them as gods, all knowing, all-powerful and all controlling. As we grow older we realize this is not the case. So eventually most of us, perhaps less so nowadays, come to believe in god(s) to replace our parents. Perhaps we too as a civilization have lost the respect and reverence of past civilizations and now find ourselves seeking a replacement, i.e. mysterious alien civilizations.

Derek Grubb
Bunbury, Australia

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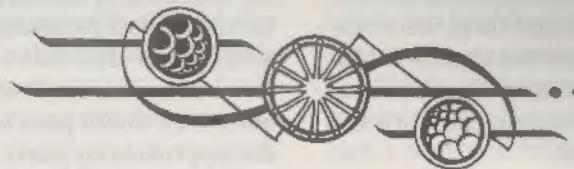
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'THERE WAS NO HORIZON.'

THE GATEWAY OF ETERNITY



— PART ONE —

Brian Stableford

Preface

In *The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires* the anthropologist Edward Copplestone invited four of his acquaintances to bring one guest each to a dinner party held in January 1895, at which he told them of his experiments with a new drug capable of inducing prophetic dreams. H. G. Wells brought M. P. Shiel. Sir William Crookes brought Nikola Tesla. Copplestone's doctor brought the man with whom he shared rooms in Baker Street, who had lately served as a model for the leading character in a series of detective stories by the doctor published in *The Strand*. Oscar Wilde brought the man with whom he happened to be dining that evening: an Eastern European count who had recently fled Paris, after killing a man in a duel prompted by the insinuation that he was a vampire.

Copplestone explained that the effect of his drug was to enable a dreamer to cast a ghost-like "timeshadow" – a material but somewhat attenuated body – in some future era. In his first two adventures, undertaken at some cost of his health, he learned that the human race was soon to be supplanted by a race of vampiric shapeshifters, which had been living as mimics on the fringes of human society since time immemorial. He was afraid that his appearances among them had alarmed them and that they might be trying to reach back in time to kill him, hoping to ensure that he could not change the history which had allowed their inheritance of the Earth. Although Copplestone did die, he left behind a record of his third expedition in futurity, during which his timeshadow had been strengthened by nanomachines in order that he could be shown the world of technological marvels that the "overmen" – the descendants of man's cousins – had built, and thus converted to their cause.

Among Copplestone's guests only the embittered Count Lugard was prepared to believe that the time traveller's experiences were more than mere hallucinations, and to find hope in that belief. He stole the remaining supply of Copplestone's drug and the formula for its manufacture, and took a powerful dose in spite of an attempt made by the doctor's friend to stop him.

In *The Black Blood of the Dead* the doctor's friend – now more convinced than ever that he was entitled to consider himself a great

detective – sought out Oscar Wilde in Paris in the autumn of 1900. The horribly emaciated detective gave Wilde a manuscript entitled *The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires*, allegedly dictated to him by the late Count Lugard during one of his own adventures in futurity. The detective then described these experiences to an audience consisting of Remy de Gourmont, Alfred Jarry, Camille Flammarion and Wilde.

The detective had found the Earth desolate and its atmosphere incapable of sustaining life, but his timeshadow had been saved from destruction by "nanozoons." After receiving the formula for an advanced form of the drug he had returned to the future and separately encountered two humanoid machines which claimed to house the personalities of Copplestone and Lugard. These two were apparently locked in conflict, in alliance with vast robotic armies, and the detective's appearance had caused the muted hostility of the conflict to flare up in murderous violence.

The detective learned that the empire of the "overmen" had been destroyed by a hail of cometary debris displaced from the outer solar system by the passage of a massive body. The survivors, forced to abandon Earth, had adopted resilient mechanical bodies better adapted to life in airless space. Many had left the solar system, encountering alien Others not unlike themselves. Such encounters confirmed the opinion of the majority that the purpose of their new evolutionary phase was to join in with a project to convert all the mass in the universe into a single vast machine, which would organize and supervise the collapse which would begin as soon as the cosmos reached the limit of its expansion.

Like Copplestone, the detective was afraid that the mechanical descendants of the overmen might reach back through time, altering history in such a way as to snuff him out. In spite of Wilde's supportive testimony, the other hearers of his story could not believe that it was anything but a glorious fantasy – but Wilde now had nothing to lose, and after advising the detective to establish a secret society to manage the future use of the drug he accepted a dose himself, in the hope that he might cheat death exactly as Copplestone and Lugard had, and find a home in a future even more advanced than theirs.



1 Between midnight and daybreak on April 19th there was a lull in the firing, which lasted nearly six hours. The signaller took advantage of the quiet period to fall into a deep sleep. Unfortunately, the wound that I had sustained on the tenth would not grant me any peace. I had not given it time to heal properly, and now it was getting worse.

Since my release from the hospital I had not slept for more than 30 minutes at a time, and then only fitfully. Supplies of morphine were very low, and there were others whose need was evidently greater than mine. It was my inability to rest, as much as any other consideration, that had caused me to volunteer to man the Forward Observation Post on Mont Kemmel.

At first, the Scottish captain who had passed on the order requiring me to hold myself ready for reassignment for special duties had taken a dim view of my acceptance of the post. A few hours after chiding me, however, MacLeod had spoken to me on the land-line, telling me that my position might, after all, be perfectly convenient – and to be ready to accept relief at any moment of the day or night.

I had no idea what the “special duties” might entail, and had been sworn to such close secrecy that I had not been able to discuss the matter with my own commanding officer. I knew that MacLeod was under the orders of General Hartley, who had taken the trouble to visit me in person but I no longer felt capable of any powerful curiosity, nor even of any desperate anxiety. Although my family had always called me Hope, I had none of my own. All I was able to feel was a dull but deep discomfiture overlaid by a shallow but searing pain.

In my youth, I am certain, the same intensity of pain had seemed to me to be hellish torment; the abuses and indignities I suffered after running away from home had been parent to waking terrors as well as horrific nightmares. The pain of my war wounds, added to the routine hardships of life at the Front, must have been worse, in purely objective terms, than anything inflicted upon me by my father or the brutal mates under which I served, but it never seemed so. The war which had been advertised as “the war to end war” was in its fifth year then, and pain was so familiar and so universal that it would have seemed churlish to think my own portion of it extreme or intolerable.

In days long gone by, when I had been an apprentice at sea, disturbed and fitful sleep had invariably delivered me into the grip of fantastic dreams, but the daily reality of April 1918 was so phantasmagorical and dream-like already that no such evil deliverance could have seemed plausible. While I was surrounded by an actual Night Land from which there was no conceivable escape, I had no need to journey to any imaginary equivalent; now that every day was a chapter in the extinction of the Earth I had no need to venture into the far future to experience it.

I wish I could remember now what memories teased

my exhausted mind that night – whether the glow of fires to the north-west put me in mind of the Red Pit or whether I fancied that the trenches at my back might be reckoned the Road Where the Silent Ones Walked – but I cannot. I know now that there were Watchers abroad, that the place of the Ab-humans was closer than I had ever dared imagine, and that the long-awaited Gateway of Eternity was yawning wide – but I could not have known it then.

When I heard the sound of someone approaching I drew my pistol, even though the men were coming from the direction of our own trenches. It could have been a German detail returning from a reconnaissance mission, who had no idea that the post was there. For that reason, I issued no challenge, hoping that if they were enemies they would pass harmlessly by – but the leader of the approaching party must have had better eyesight than I, for he made straight for my position.

“Lieutenant Hodgson?” he breathed, so lightly that the whisper was barely capable of carrying a Scottish accent.

“Here, MacLeod,” I said, returning the pistol to its holster.

He came to stand beside me, while a junior officer and two riflemen crouched down outside. The narrowness of the post would have forced the captain and myself into uncomfortable proximity in any case, but he was anxious not to be overheard and he brought his lips very close to my ear in saying: “We must leave as soon as we have light enough.”

“Have you arranged for my relief, sir?” I murmured. I wondered why he could not have arranged for me to be recalled to the battery and substituted under cover of darkness.

“I have,” he said. “Lieutenant Thwaite will take your place” – he waved a finger in the direction of his crouching companion – “but you must leave your cap and belt behind, and your identity-tags.”

“Regulations do not permit it,” I said.

“If you read your orders before destroying them,” the captain replied, “you will know that the regulation does not apply to this particular case.”

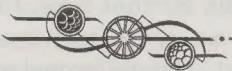
I knew well enough that in what Buchan and le Queux were wont to call *the secret service* men shed their identities at the drop of a hat, carrying forward all manner of bold masquerades – but I had always been a mere artilleryman. My French was good, but I could not have passed for a Frenchman, and I certainly could not have passed for anything more exotic, as Buchan’s heroes always seemed able to do.

“How do you expect to get away unseen?” I whispered. “If we are spotted, the Germans will know exactly where the post has been set up.”

“It is a risk we shall have to take,” he said. “We must move westwards, until we have come to the far side of Le Touquet Berthe. The Germans have re-grouped; the position is deserted. We have such desperate need of you that we are exceedingly anxious to protect you from risk, and you can trust our judgment in this matter.”

“Yes sir,” I said, meekly. I had no idea that I was sealing the poor signaller’s death-warrant, and condemning

the meagre remains of the man who took my place to lie in a grave marked with my name.



2 We had gone no more than 150 yards before we were able to drop down into a deserted trench, and we began to make our painstaking way through the maze towards Le Touquet Berthe. We had gone a fair way without encountering any significant obstacle, but when the mists began to evaporate in the heat of the sun, shells began to whistle overhead in some profusion. It was the Germans who started the barrage, but the 84th had been making ready to match it for two days and our own guns leapt to action as if they were determined to match Ludendorff shot for shot.

"We must keep going," MacLeod said, as we crouched down in a rain of mud, ankle-deep in filthy water. "Stay low, but move as fast as you can."

The eyes of the two riflemen glared within their spattered faces, lit by fear and by that strangely fervent resentment enlisted men sometimes display when their orders merely state the obvious.

One blast knocked MacLeod from his feet, and while we paused another sent shrapnel screaming around us. I took a piece of shrapnel in my thigh, a foot below the re-opened wound that was causing me such trouble. It was a mere sliver, and seemed no worse in context than a bee-sting, but although I was slow I had been able to move reasonably freely before, in spite of the gash in my side – with that dart embedded in my muscle my whole leg threatened to seize up. MacLeod cursed roundly, and told the riflemen to stand to either side of me and stay close – not just to help me walk but to shield me from any further harm.

"This man is precious," he barked, when one of them hesitated. "If he dies, there'll be hell to pay!"

The shells continued to fall, although the vast majority were travelling over our heads. The world to either side of us was filled with the awful sound of their overlapping blasts, and we seemed to be scrambling through a narrow margin, like a bridge of planks suspended over a chasm.

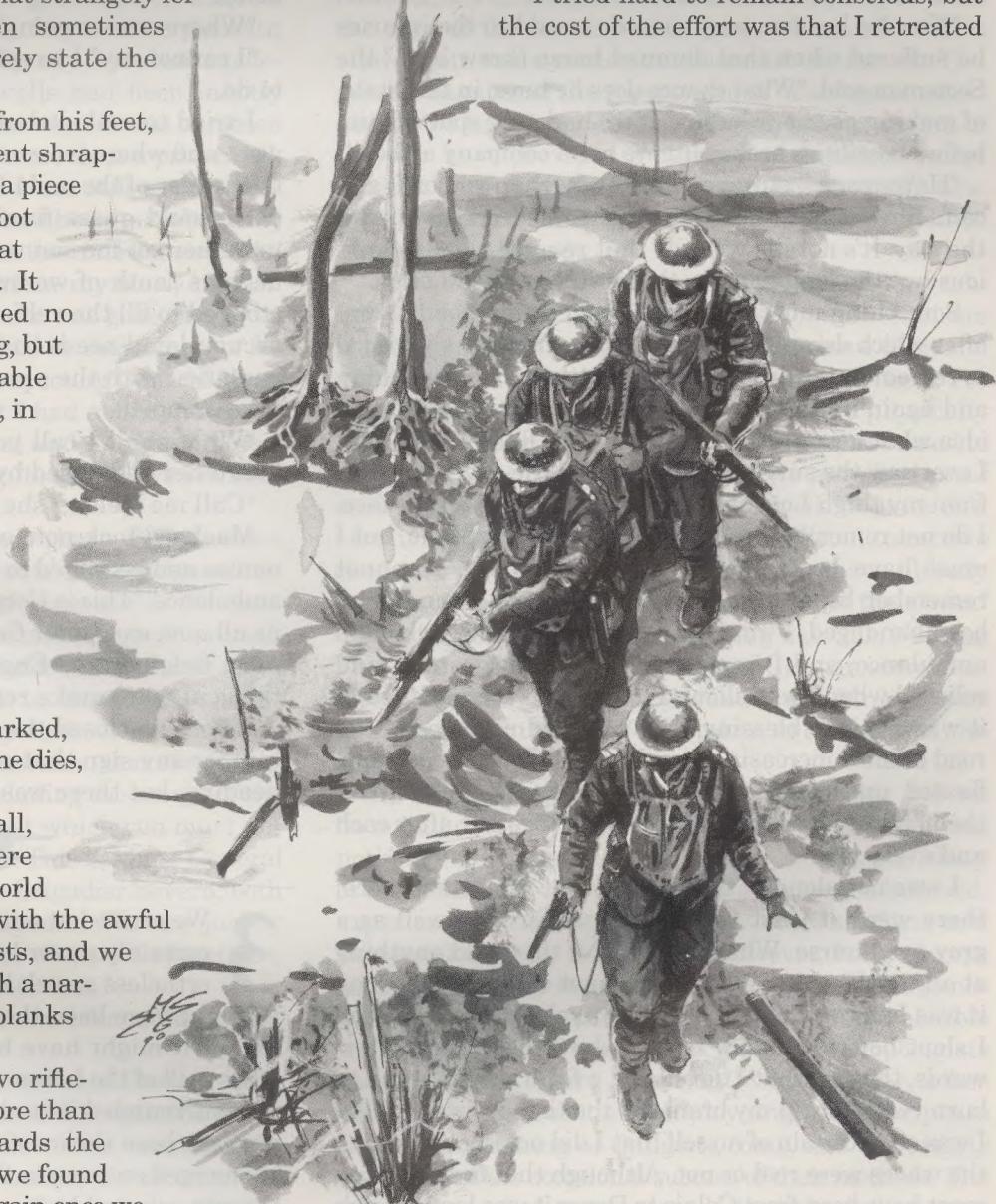
Only half-supported by the two riflemen I must have walked for more than a mile before we turned towards the British lines. Not unnaturally, we found ourselves in mortal danger yet again once we were among our own side's guns, and we were more exposed than we had been in the abandoned

trenches. The soft mist which had blanketed the land at daybreak had now been replaced by clouds of stinking smoke and stinging dust, but there was no gas.

My doubled wound increased its harassment of my spirit. I refused to recognize or respond to its deprivations but infirmity ignored is still infirmity; I grew weaker by the minute while the shells aimed at the French guns fell behind us. The shellbursts seemed actually to be following us deeper and deeper into our own territory. I was only mildly astonished when the captain took the place of the younger rifleman, seizing my arm in a powerful grip and hurrying me on. "It's not much further," he growled. "We'll get a surgeon to that leg as soon as possible. It's only a scratch."

I meant to assure him that I had not the slightest intention of faltering, and I contrived to utter at least half a sentence before my legs and lungs betrayed me, but my flesh gave the lie to my optimism. I collapsed, and would have fallen had the captain and the rifleman not held me up.

I tried hard to remain conscious, but the cost of the effort was that I retreated



"THIS MAN IS PRECIOUS."

within myself to an extraordinary extent. I could not pay more than the most fleeting attention to my surroundings, and hardly noticed when we finally moved far enough beyond the scope of the German guns to find a measure of quiet. The relief I felt when I was bundled into the seat of a car was profound but momentary; robbed of the need to keep account of my awkward progress, my mind felt free to let my senses reel. I slumped in the corner, my eyes looking outwards from the side-window of the car.

"You left it too late," I heard the Scotsman say.

"Not my decision," replied a voice whose accent was contrasting, and yet not entirely dissimilar.

"We should have taken him while he was still in England. We could have done it easily, if only the idiots across the water had not dithered."

"Who could have known that he would pass the medical board? Who could have anticipated that they would reassign him when they did – and to Ypres of all places?" I placed the second man's accent; it was Irish, from the north rather than the south.

"Now he has two new wounds to add to the injuries he suffered when that damned horse threw him," the Scotsman said. "What chance does he have, in this state, of making good our losses? If we had only spotted him before hostilities broke out! We are a company of fools!"

"He's strong – stronger, I dare say, than you or I, and certainly stronger than Copplestone was when he opened the way. It's not his wounds that require us to be anxious but the long journey that still lies ahead of us."

Something must have happened in my head thereafter which deranged my senses. I have never succeeded in remembering any more. I know that I ate at midday, and again in the evening, but I have not the slightest idea what hospital it was at which we finally arrived. If I ever saw the surgeon who removed the sliver of metal from my thigh I could not keep the memory of his face. I do not remember being injected with morphine, but I must have been injected with *something*. I cannot remember being dressed again after my wounds had been bandaged. I was certainly put into the back of an ambulance, and I know that I felt very grateful and relieved when I was allowed to lie down there, although it was a mixed blessing. The ruts and potholes in the road seemed increasingly malevolent. My mind became fixated upon such jarring disturbances: waiting for them, counting them, pulling myself together after each and every one.

I was not alone in the back of that first ambulance; there were at least two men in uniform as well as a grey-eyed nurse. What they said, if they said anything at all, made no impression. I cannot estimate how long it was before I finally contrived to sleep, nor how long I slept before waking. It must have been soon afterwards, though, that I developed a fever which began to burn very hotly in my brain. By the time we were at sea I was so uncertain of myself that I did not know whether the waves were real or not. Although that first crossing must have been from Calais to Dover it was long enough and rough enough to raise sinister echoes in my soul. Of our transit of England I remember next to nothing, but

I must have been on the road to recovery by the time we took to the water again – crossing, I must suppose, from Holyhead to Dublin. By that time, I had grown accustomed to the presence of the grey-eyed nurse, who was distant but efficient. The uniformed man who was with me during that second crossing was an orderly, who hardly ever met my eye.

It was not until we had been on the road for some time, in yet another ambulance, that I was able to engage in a real conversation. By then, MacLeod had taken up a position by my side.

"I fear that I have been very ill," I said to him.

"Your wounds became infected," he told me. "The height of your fever caused some anxiety, but the crisis soon passed. You'll make a full recovery."

"Has the secret mission for which you recruited me been cancelled?" I asked.

"It has not," he assured me. "It is as vital as it ever was, and you are still the man best fitted for the job. General Hartley is determined to press ahead without delay."

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"I cannot say," he replied, as he was doubtless bound to do.

I tried to make what estimate I could of where we were and where we were headed, but the only windows at the rear of the ambulance were set high in the doors. All I could guess from the altitude and subsequent movement of the sun was that we were travelling a few degrees south of westwards. It was not until we had stopped to fill the vehicle's tank and attend to our own accumulated needs that I was able to strike up a conversation with the nurse while the captain was otherwise occupied.

"What shall I call you?" I asked her, having never heard her addressed by name.

"Call me Helen," she said.

MacLeod took note of the fact that I was asking for names and beckoned to the orderly who was driving the ambulance. "This is Corporal Heath," he said. "You know us all now, except for Colonel Wrightman. He was with us in Belgium and England, but he's gone ahead with the general to make ready for your arrival."

Before he closed the door behind him I looked past him for any sign that might have told me where I was heading, but there was none that I could see.



3 We arrived at our destination that evening. I had certainly never been there before, but I was nevertheless struck by a strange sense of familiarity. It might have been the sound of water splashing as it fell, or it might have been something about the grey stone wall of the house which confronted me, or the wall that surrounded its unkempt garden – or it might simply have been the inevitable re-emergence of the barely-submerged awareness that the west of Ireland had been the site selected by my imagination-driven pen for the location of one of my nightmare-based romances.

For whatever reason, I became acutely conscious not

merely of the fact that I now stood *on the borderland*, but that the borderland in question was one that I had faced, and traversed, before. The house set beside the road seemed perfectly ordinary, and the flat landscape stretching to the western horizon where the sun hovered, invisibly, behind a cluster of pink clouds seemed positively bland, but I could scarcely suppress a shudder as I looked at them. The sound of falling water was only a sudden shower – there was no stream nearby – but it seemed ominous nevertheless.

"Hurry," said the captain, ducking beneath the assault of the heavy raindrops. "We must get inside."

The door was already open. Had I been fit I could have run to it, covering the intervening distance in a dozen strides or less, but as things were I had to be supported by the captain and the orderly.

While they hurried me inside I had only time to note that the house was a sprawling affair, hardly a mansion but bigger than an inn or farmhouse. Its roof was slate and its walls showed signs of recent repair. I was taken along a corridor to a room on the ground floor, where a bed had been made ready for me. It was not a pleasant room – the ceiling was too low for my taste and inadequately plastered, while the walls had been ineptly painted with a sickly cream gloss – but it was carpeted and seemed a little more like a home than a prison cell.

I was immediately put to bed. I was still wearing my pyjamas, although a greatcoat had been put about my shoulders while we crossed from the ambulance to the house. It was Helen who brought me my meal, after an hour's impatient rest, but when she was gone there was very little delay before I was visited by individuals of far greater importance. I had been expecting General Hartley and Colonel Wrightman but I had not been expecting to see another major-general and a brigadier.

"I am sorry, sir," I told Hartley, "to come to you in such a miserable condition."

"It's not the fitness of your body that will determine the success of your mission, Lieutenant Hodgson," he assured me. "It's the quality of your mind. We have every reason to think, in spite of all that you have suffered, that your mind is as powerful now as it ever was. Are you ready to hear what will be required of you?"

"I am," I said, as loyalty compelled.

"Very well. You understand, I assume, that everything you hear within these walls – including the names of the people gathered here – is a secret which you must not divulge under any circumstances. This is Major-General Sir Philip Horniman, and this is Brigadier Severn, both seconded from Military Intelligence. We are jointly responsible for certain categories of special operations, involving esoteric scientific researches."

When he paused, waiting for some acknowledgement, I nodded my head.

"We have some reason to believe," said Hartley, "that the war which has sapped Britain's strength these last five years will soon end. We shall reckon ourselves the victors, and punish our enemies harshly for all that they have done to us – but the spoils will be meagre. In 1914 Europe was the economic heart of the world, and might have remained so had the continent not been so deeply

divided against itself; from now on, the economic heart of the world will beat in New York."

I could not decide how old Hartley was. The lines on his face suggested that he must be well over 50, but there was not a trace of grey in his hair. Horniman seemed much younger, although his features were even more severe. Both were clean-shaven, as was the thin-faced Brigadier.

"Britain went into this war convinced that it might provide the means to secure Anglo-Saxon hegemony over the entire world," the speaker went on. "The intention was to consolidate the empire and make it safe from the envy of less happy nations. We have not achieved that, and we have reason to believe that there is a greater holocaust still to come. We need to know everything that can be known about that threat, if we are to have the slightest chance of averting or ameliorating it."

"There is a great deal that I am forbidden to tell you, not merely by reason of the nation's security but by reason of the nature of the task which lies before you. I can, however, say that experiments have been going on since the turn of the century with drugs whose effect is to allow their users access to visions of the future. The greater number of the reports which have been carried back to us have been direly confused, but the events of the war have provided a number of checks to be set against data recovered before its beginning. We now have enough evidence to be sure that the drugs do have considerable efficacy."

"I do not wish to deceive you as to the risk you are taking, so I will admit more than a dozen of the volunteers who have taken part in our experiments have died, and more than a hundred have suffered some ill-effects. For some years, we selected subjects who were physically robust, on the grounds that they would be best fitted to resist the toxicity of the drugs, but we have had proof enough that this policy was misconceived. We have now concluded that those individuals best-fitted to receive the most powerful drugs are those who have already demonstrated an innate visionary power of their own."

I had not been expecting anything like this. Nothing I had learned about the British and German secret services from such ardent propagandists as Mr le Queux had suggested that they had taken to dabbling in the sibylline arts.

"All men dream," Hartley went on, sonorously "but we do not all dream alike. Three in four of us, at least, find nothing but trouble-less confusion in our dreams. Many of the remainder, if Dr Freud of Vienna can be believed, experience dreams shaped by our inner conflicts and repressed desires. Some men, however, have always believed that their dreams contain awkward intelligence of things to come, which might be infinitely valuable were it not so difficult to decipher. Anthropologists assure us that there are countless primitive tribes whose holy men routinely employ drugs in attempts to obtain forewarning of things to come, and are utterly convinced of the occasional success of their methods. The greatest proof of our success is that the information which has allowed us to refine and perfect these potions, so as to maximize their visionary potential and mini-

mise their undesirable side-effects, has itself been transmitted back to us from the distant future.

"I think you will understand, by now, why we selected you for recruitment to our peculiar cause, Lieutenant Hodgson. We have scoured the Western world for men who have demonstrated visionary power and acumen in their writings. We have approached dozens, and have won the limited co-operation of most. It has been suggested that we should have identified and approached you as soon as you published *The House on the Borderland*, but we were not in a position then to identify those aspects of that fascinating document which showed clear evidence of prophetic ability. *The Night Land* provided further clues, but even in 1912 its correspondences with other items in our records seemed vague, and their relevance dubious. We can only apologize for our tardiness – and assure you that we now have data which have convinced us that you are the man for the mission we have in mind."

"I fear, sir, that I have been very ill," I told him, frankly. "I have already accepted this commission, and have given my tacit consent to anything you may care to do with me, but I cannot in all conscience say that I am fit enough, as yet, to be given a dangerous drug."

"I know that," said General Hartley, "but it is not in our interests to subject you to any ordeal that might prove fatal. If you are to serve us, then you must return from this mission alive and articulate, with sufficient strength of body and mind to attempt further visionary odysseys. If we believed that the risk to your life could be lessened by delay, we would wait."

I was not particularly relieved to hear it, although I followed the logic of his argument readily enough.

"Is there anyone here who has used this drug?" I asked, surveying the general's silent companions.

"Apart from Sir Philip and myself," the general said, "there is no one in this house who has not, including Miss Flynn. Brigadier Severn, Colonel Wrightman and Captain MacLeod are all in a position to reassure you that the experience can be borne, and that it can sometimes add to a man's strength rather than depleting it."

It took me a moment or two to realize that Miss Flynn must be grey-eyed Helen. I looked at Severn, and he looked back at me. "It's true," he said. "I only wish I had been better able to serve."

"We would not countenance this if we did not think that there were rewards to be won," Horniman put in. "We have, however, forbidden everyone here to say anything about the shape of the future as they or others have tentatively sketched it out. Because the expectations and inclinations of the visionary mind have the capacity to pollute and confuse the content of prophetic dreams, there is no folly greater than to fill a would-be explorer with expectations."

"If you have found information in my literary visions which matches news of the future brought back by these and other men," I said, "then I already have grounds enough for thinking that the experience will be profoundly disturbing."

"And we," General Hartley countered, "have grounds enough for thinking that the threats which will face us

in the future are too dark and awesome to be let alone."

"But if a vision of the future can be true," I said, "that implies that the future cannot be altered, even with the aid of foreknowledge. That is a frightening thought, is it not? It ought to make us wish with all our might that we cannot obtain true knowledge of the future – except, perhaps, insofar as we may concern ourselves with the acceptably inevitable."

"Alas," said Hartley, "our wishing will make no difference. If the future can be known, then we must make it known – and we must hope that having become known, it may also become avoidable. There is not a man in our organization who does not hope with all his might that if we can only act wisely on the basis of the dreams we induce, then future users of the drugs might discover far happier news of a much brighter future."

"Do you think that is possible, sir?" I asked him.

"How shall we know," he answered, "until we have tried, with all our might, to *make it possible*?"



4 There is no point in my setting down here a further record of my experiences in that stupidly mundane parallel of the House on the Borderland. Perhaps, if I had devoted myself to intensive investigations, I could have discovered a great deal more about its inhabitants and the organization to which they belonged. I could have sneaked out of my room at night on exploratory expeditions. I could have bombarded my various attendants with all manner of cunning questions, calculated to obtain information in spite of their orders. Had I been as great a detective as Doyle's titan of The Strand, or even my own Carnacki, that is probably what I would have done. In fact, I simply obeyed my orders to the letter.

When the time came for me to lie down upon my overly familiar bed and accept the injection in my arm, General Hartley leaned over me as if to speak in confidence. "We have reason to think that some of the individuals you might encounter within your dream might be hostile to us," he said. "You must be on your guard. It might be in the interests of certain inhabitants of the future to lie to you. Take nothing on trust."

I did my best to signal with my gaze that I would do my duty as well as I possibly could, and as warily too – exactly as my commander, my country and my king were entitled to expect of me.

At first, the effect of the drug was not unlike morphine. I felt as though I were falling gratefully asleep, released from the burdens of worry and pain. I drifted into a dream in a far lighter manner than had been my habit in recent days, and the images which pressed in upon my quiet consciousness did not seem at all threatening. I fell through a colourless spectrum of light and dark which flickered unsteadily, but there seemed to be nothing eerie or disturbing in the oscillatory effect. There were longer periods of darkness too, but the darkness never seemed pregnant with evil. It was difficult to think clearly, but the one idea which did seem to float to the surface of my mind was the possibility that the

general had dangled before me: that while the power to remake the future had been increased by warning visions, so the future itself must have been improved and made increasingly hospitable for future visitors. When the world stabilized around me, that possibility was trembling on the brink of full and active consciousness, ready for application to what I saw – and what I saw, at first, did not in any way defy the optimistic expectation.

I found myself lying on ground as level as the bleak plain that had surrounded the house in Ireland, but much more lushly furnished. I was cushioned by thick green grass, and the profuse boughs of trees extended over me like a great reckless arch, some dressed in pink blossom and others crowded with mistletoe-like growths. The crowns of the trees were dense but not so opaque that I could not see the cloudless sky beyond, bluer and brighter than any sky I had ever seen over war-torn Belgium. Birds were singing, as they never sang in the scarred landscapes of Belgium, and their tunes seemed perfectly familiar – almost as if the hidden singers were not merely members of species I knew, but actual individuals whose songs I had heard before.

My own self, by contrast, seemed distinctly less familiar. I felt very strange – heavy and awkward – but when I looked at my own hand it seemed far less substantial than I remembered it, almost translucent. Even more puzzling was the fact that I seemed to be attired in a dress uniform, which had all the appropriate badges of rank and yet was curiously light, quite unreal. As I climbed to my feet, knee-deep in the tangled grass, I could hardly believe that I was the same man who had lain in bed in the house in Ireland – nor, for that matter, the same man who had suffered such terrible nightmares in my youth.

Perhaps the war has scoured me clean of all my direr fears, I thought, as I ducked beneath a trailing branch. Perhaps the horrors of reality have impressed themselves so powerfully upon me that there is nothing left within me but a delicate fever for beauty and quiet, and a sense of my own insubstantiality in the face of eternity.

I tried to draw a deep breath, convinced that the forest must be full of sweet scents, but that proved oddly difficult. I certainly felt as if I had lungs, but it no longer seemed to be the case that I could inflate them with an easy gesture of the diaphragm. I could not smell anything, even when I opened my mouth as if to taste the air with a moist tongue.

I turned slowly, searching for a path or any

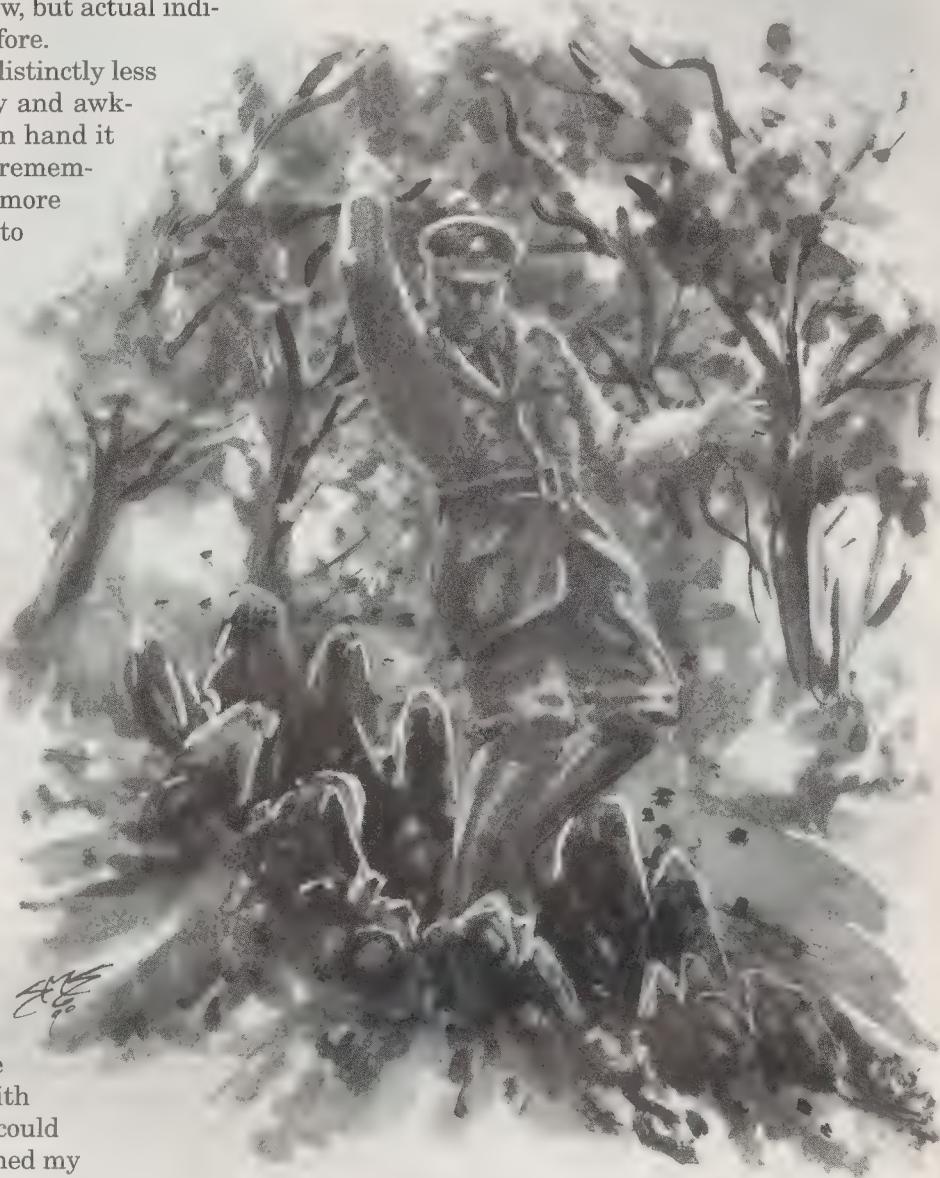
other evidence of human habitation. There was nothing, but I could not believe that the woodland was entirely wild. It was too comfortable for that, too mild in its appearance. Had the surrounds of Mont Kemmel been like this, I wondered, before the guns had been set for the very first barrage?

Then the world exploded.

The trees rattled as if their crowns had been strafed by machine-gun fire. The grassy ground beneath my feet, which had seemed so richly clad, peeled back its turf abruptly, and opened lips of loam. Those lips drew back as if in a snarl, to reveal teeth of granite.

It seemed that the whole glade had become an avid and furious mouth, with no intent but to suck me in and chew me into pulp. I felt a stab of alarm, but nothing like the rush of panic I might have expected. As I looked down into the gaping hole the thought that surged into my mind was that I was in a dream, and that as soon as I began to fall I would awake, safe in my bed.

I did not awake – but neither did I begin to fall. Given



'TO REVEAL TEETH OF GRANITE.'

that I was in a dream, that did not seem unduly astonishing.

In my less nightmarish dreams I had often floated, in calm and lordly defiance of the dictates of gravity, and I floated now. My body still felt unduly heavy and cumbersome, but I found no cause for wonder that it could also be reckoned light as thistledown.

It was not until I actually began to rise into the woodland canopy that I realized that I was in the grip of some exotic force – that I had been snatched from the brink of disaster by an invisible but powerful hand. When I was taken up, however, I felt the pressure about my torso and abdomen. I looked down, half-expecting to see visible strands coiling about me, but there was only a curious uncertainty in the air, like the heat haze rising from a hot gun-carriage.

The living ground was not prepared to accept defeat so easily, however; it reared up after me.

It was as if some giant sleeping beneath the tangled sward had been awakened by my arrival, and had awakened fearfully hungry for the flesh and blood of an Englishman. It might almost have been a comfort to look down and see baleful eyes staring up at me, enviously measuring my ascent, because that would have placed me unambiguously in a fairy tale – but whatever sense inspired the growing tower it was not the kind of sight that required human eyes, and whatever the hunger was that guided it was no mere animal impulse. For a few seconds, I thought it might actually catch me and snatch me back – but as it extended like a snaking tentacle it was grabbed as I had been grabbed, and forced into conflict with some invisible adversary carved from the very air.

By the time my upward progress was arrested I was at least 200 feet above the crowns of the tallest trees in the wood. Now that I was suspended, with no visible means of support, I had the opportunity to become giddy, but I was not nearly as distressed as I might have been. I still had it firmly in mind that this was a dream. I was a dreamer who had dwelt in the Night Land, and on terrible derelicts lost in the Sargasso Sea; I had seen the death of the Earth and the advent of the Dark Sun; the Ab-humans and the Silent One were no strangers to me. Why should I be frightened by the thought of being caught in an invisible bubble of force a mere 200 feet above an angry forest?

I watched the flexible tower of earth do battle with the invisible spirits of the air, writhing madly as if to swat them away. I watched it lose the battle, and the war. It collapsed ignominiously back into the body of the forest, dissolving into the spaces between the trees. It left no scar behind when the canopy closed above the place where it had fallen back. I tried to shout *Hurrah!*, but when I opened my mouth to let the syllables go I found that my vocal apparatus was as strangely leaden as my frail flesh.

Birds began to rise from the boughs of the trees in awful profusion, the sunlight glinting on polished feathers of every possible hue. With such brightness about them I thought at first that they must be parrots and birds of paradise, but they were more like thrushes and

finches in form. The great majority were very small, but there were so many that it was difficult to pick out individuals within the coloured chaos. They flew at me in a great cloud, fighting for space as if each and every one were desperate to pluck the eyes out of my head. I lashed out reflexively with arms and feet, although the birds were so many that I could not possibly have shooed them way with such limited instruments. Whatever it was that held me had greater resources, but its ingenuity seemed greatly tested by the storm of wings. The air surrounding me writhed and seethed, contorting some elastic envelope in a manner that was amazingly rapid and topologically incalculable.

The birds were ripped apart in mid-air by the hundred, their feathers exploding in all directions, but hundreds more contrived to collide with my body, pecking madly at my flesh. I had no alternative but to snatch up my hands, using them to cover and protect my eyes. I felt the pricking of their multitudinous beaks and claws upon my legs and torso. The stings rained most intensely upon my forearms and the backs of my hands, and I felt sure that my uniform must be in shreds and my skin running with blood.

I felt that I was rising up yet again, more rapidly this time, but I had to trust to subtler senses to tell me how far I had come from the forest canopy; while the vicious birds still flocked around me I dared not look. I tried to breathe deeply, but could not do it. The act of breathing seemed to take all the strength I had.

As soon as I felt certain that I would not faint the impacts ceased, and the flutter of wings died away. I felt safe again. When I lowered my arms and lifted my eyelids I saw that there was no blood at all on the backs of my hands, and that my uniform was not in the least distressed. I also saw that the air around me was coalescing, becoming tangible. I was captive within a clearly-discernible bubble, or perhaps some softly-faceted gem.

Within the gem-like chamber in which I was now enclosed I continued to rise into the sky. When I looked down, I could see a coastline separating the forest from a broad blue sea, but I could not recognize the contours of Ireland; the distinctive shapes of Erris Head and Blacksod Bay were nowhere to be seen. Nor was there the least sign of any human habitation: no towns, no harbours, no ships afloat on the oceanic expanse. The near-noon sun was exceedingly large and bright, and the refraction of its light through the facets of the cell which confined me sent dazzling rays in every direction, bringing tears to my eyes and forcing me to squint so narrowly that I almost lost sight of the world below.

The blue of heaven grew deeper as I climbed, although the brightness of the sun did not in the least diminish. The sun's light became whiter, more like the pure radiance of distant stars – until it was eclipsed by a black shadow. That plunge into darkness made me shudder as if I had been chilled, although there was no perceptible alteration of temperature. I opened my eyes wider, but my pupils could not adapt to the abrupt transition, and the shape that folded itself around me seemed utterly black. I could not imagine that it would have

been much different to have fallen into the awful grave which had been so enthusiastic to gather me into the bosom of the Earth.



5 My eyes had no sooner begun to be reconciled to the darkness, dimly perceiving shapes within the gloom, than they had to fight all over again for accommodation to a flood of bright yellow light I found, somewhat to my relief, that I was standing on a solid floor, which gleamed like polished silver. I felt light on my feet, as if I were possessed of a fraction of my normal mass; after feeling so lumpenly heavy before that seemed an intoxicating release. There was a chair before me, which grew out of the floor upon a squat stalk. The upholstery was black and slick, like no fabric I had ever seen before.

Seated in the chair, in a relaxed position with legs lazily crossed, was an approximate image of a man cast in pliable metal. It gestured with its right arm, as if to demonstrate that it was no mere automaton jointed with bolts and axles. I thought of the Talos of Greek legend, although this creature's colour was closer to bronze than brass. Its eyes were like almonds of jet and its ruddy lips seemed soft and moist. The face, in isolation, might have seemed feminine by virtue of its hairlessness and the gentleness of its lazy contours, but its torso was innocent of any breast-like curvature and its naked groin was quite featureless.

"Can you understand this language?" it said. Its manner of speech was a little hesitant. I could not see how the syllables were produced; its lips hardly moved. I knew that Villiers de l'Isle Adam had written a story in which Thomas Edison had made a perfect woman of electrified metal – an android to satisfy a nobleman tired of the fickleness of actual women. Perhaps, I thought, it had been a more voluptuous version of the creature which faced me now. At any rate, the imagination of my immediate forebears had countenanced such individuals as this, and there was no reason to be unduly surprised to find one in my dream of futurity.

"Yes," I said, forcing the word out with

some difficulty. "I am an Englishman. What are you?"

It gestured again with its arms. It was pointing to a chair positioned behind me, identical to the one in which it was sitting. Before lowering myself into it I looked briefly round the room in which we sat. It was very narrow, no wider than was necessary to contain the two chairs. The walls were metallic, of a brazen hue not much different from the android; they were dressed with an intricate tracery of black and blue lines. There was no evidence of a door.

"I am a scion of the Engine," the android replied, as I lowered my lightened body into the chair. "May we know your name?"

"William Hope Hodgson," I replied, only a little awkwardly. "Second Lieutenant, Royal Field Artillery, most recently attached to the 84th Battery of the 11th Brigade."

The pause was so brief that it might have been mistaken for mere hesitation. "Second Lieutenant W. Hope

Hodgson, RFA," the android quoted, in a flat tone,

"killed in action on April 17, was the second son of the late Rev. Samuel



'LIKE A WELL-POLISHED DECANTER ...'

Hodgson, and the author of *The Boats of the Glen Carrig*, *The Night Land*, *Men of the Deep Waters* and other books. His early days were spent in the merchant service. "

The impassive tone of the narration was too eerie, and I felt that I had to interrupt. "I am certain that I was still alive and well on the 28th of April," I said, "if it is the year 1918 of which we are speaking."

The creature fell silent, as if pondering.

"Do you have a name?" I asked. "What year is this?"

"I have no name," the metal man informed me. "You have come approximately twelve million years into what you reckon as the future. Was it on the 27th of April, 1918, that you took the drug which projected a timeshadow here?"

Twelve million years! It seemed utterly incredible that my name and rank might be recognized after such an interval. Even though some of the information recited by the android had been erroneous, it had been available almost upon the instant!

The android waited patiently for my reply

"I think it was the 28th," I said, cautiously.

"Who administered the drug to you?"

The general's warning came to mind; I was supposed to be on my guard against deception. "Why do you want to know that?" I parried.

"The Archive is incomplete," the machine informed me, calmly. "We would be grateful for any data you can add."

"When will the war end?" I asked, abruptly – only realizing afterwards that I should have used the word *did*.

"World War One," recited the machine. "1914 to 1918. The armistice was signed at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month."

November! Less than six months! Five seconds passed before it occurred to me that I had missed the most important item of information.

"World War One," I repeated. "How many World Wars will... *were* there?"

"World War Two, 1939 to 1945," said the machine, impassively. "World War Three, or the First Plague War, 2011 to 2017. The Second Plague War, or World War Four, 2022 to 2028. Will you tell us now who administered the drug? We did not expect to receive any further time-travellers, certainly not in the location at which you appeared, but someone knew better. If you will tell us who it was who sent you..."

"Military Intelligence," I said, seeing no good reason not to give way. "General Hartley."

The machine was silent for a moment; its face remained expressionless. Then it said: "General Anthony Somerton Hartley, Grenadier Guards. 1869-1937?"

I had never heard Hartley's Christian name, but the initial on the written orders I had received had been A. I nodded my head to signify agreement with the tentative identification. "I had not expected to travel twelve million years," I said, "but I suppose that I have come as far before, and even further. I have seen the final act of the story of mankind played out against the backcloth of the Night Land, and the death of the Earth itself as

it spiralled into the dying sun."

"Yes," said the metal man, after another brief hesitation. "We know something of your previous visions."

It occurred to me that the general might have made a mistake in selecting a dreamer with ambitions like mine, if what he required was intelligence of the 20th century – but it was not inconceivable that he knew of the Archive to which the android had referred

"Why did the Earth attempt to swallow me?" I asked.

"It was a trap," the other replied, serenely. "If it was an attempt to destroy you, it must have been set by Consolidators. If the intention was to capture you, it may have been Transformers of a more ambitious kind."

"Your era must be accustomed to visitations like mine," I said. It seemed a safe enough inference, if there were names for whole classes of individuals who found such visitations offensive.

"There has been none for half a million years," the android informed me, "and none by a timeshadow which had the capacity to return for more than two million."

That seemed strange, but there were more urgent questions I wanted to ask. "What are Consolidators?"

"Individuals which seek a decrease in the play of uncertainty, with the eventual aim of negating its effect within this inflationary domain, thus establishing a closed realm of absolute control."

It was an exceedingly unhelpful answer. I decided to try again, regardless. "Transformers?"

"Individuals which believe that the present may be profitably changed by interference with the past. Most Transformers work in the cause of Consolidation; a fugitive few actively seek to increase the play of uncertainty, for reasons that are unclear to us. We are sorry that we cannot make these matters clearer to you. The Archive is incomplete; we do not know how best to frame our explanations – but we will take you to a place where there is an individual who may know better."

"And what is this Engine of which you are a scion?"

"The Engine is a company of sentient machines working in collaboration towards a common end," the android replied. "Scions are individualized units with independent powers of discernment and decision."

"Machines made in the image of men," I said.

"This scion was shaped in this manner for the specific purpose of receiving you," it told me. "The remotest ancestors of the Engine were made by man's successors, but not in their image. It would be more accurate to say that the overmen remade themselves in the image of their best machines."

The natural thing to do was to ask for more information about the "overmen" who were "man's successors," but I was sorely confused.

"Why did you save me from the trap?" I asked. "What do you want from me – and *why*?"

"We are interested in the past," the android said, very calmly. "We do not seek to reshape it in any way, nor to seek any increase or decrease in the play of uncertainty. We maintain the Archive, and desire to improve it. We have maintained and protected other timeshadows, because we are interested in the phenomenon."

"I apologize for my ignorance," I said. "The determin-

nation of those who gave me the time-displacing drug not to prejudice my expectations prevented my being told anything they might already know about the shape of the future. I must seem to you to be very ill-equipped for the mission on which I was sent."

"I apologize also," the other replied, courteously. "There is a matter which must be settled. If we take no action, you will be returned to your own time in a matter of hours, but we can take steps to extend your stay here. May we do that?"

"What is this *timeshadow*?" I asked, by way of procrastination.

"What may seem to you, at present, to be your body is actually a kind of projection. It is material, and may even feel unwieldy in Earthlike gravity, but it is rather attenuated. If you will permit our nanozoons to work upon it, we can increase its substance and resilience. That way, you will be able to remain here for several days, and learn a great deal more than you could in a matter of hours – always provided that we can protect you from those who may be anxious to destroy you."

I was half-inclined to hesitate for a moment more, knowing that it might prove a devil's bargain – but I knew my duty.

"Do it," I said.



6 There are no words to describe the sensations that I felt as the android's "nanozoons" set to work upon me. Suffice it to say that my ethereal envelope was invaded by tiny instruments, half-alive and half-mechanical, and strengthened by them. The process took several minutes, during which I was unable to speak, to see or to hear.

When my sight returned, the wall of the narrow room behind the android's chair had apparently become a window. The android's chair was gone and it was standing to one side so as not to obscure my view of the world beyond the vessel in which we were travelling. I had assumed, without thinking about it, that the flying machine which had collected me from the bubble must be making its way to England or continental Europe. Now I realized that our destination must be much further away. Within a field filled more abundantly with stars than any sky I had ever seen through the atmosphere of Earth hung a half-lit sphere, like a multi-faceted assembly of precious stones compounded out of emeralds and opals, turquoises and sapphires, flecked with millions of diamonds.

"What is that world?" I asked, when I had my voice again. I stood up as I spoke and moved forward to stand beside the scion of the Engine.

"It is the moon," answered the android. "It is an image only, but it is an image of what this vessel's exterior eyes can see at this very moment."

"It is not actually a window, then?"

"This vessel has no portholes, but this is what you would see were you able to look out."

"And the moon is where we are headed?"

"No. If you look closely at the field of stars, you might

be able to discern other bodies, tiny at this distance but larger than stars or planets. There are a hundred such objects sharing the moon's orbit round the Earth, and a thousand more sharing the Earth's orbit around the sun. Not all belong to the Engine, but most do. It is on one of them that the Archive of the human species is kept."

As I tried to follow the direction of the android's pointed finger the multitudinous stars seemed to blaze far more brightly, and their fire fused into a strange whole, as if they were mere elements of a vast and monstrous creature made of light. My head swam, and I had to lower my eyelids.

"Why are the records of human history not kept on Earth?" I asked, to cover my confusion.

"Earth has a different part to play in our schemes – and it is disputed territory still."

"Are there any human beings on Earth?" I asked, remembering what the creature had said about man's successors. "or anywhere else, for that matter?"

"None at all," was the crushing answer. "There are no sentient individuals in the solar system who retain more than the faintest echo of flesh and blood. The only one who identifies himself as an echo of a human being is within the worldlet where the Archive is maintained. You will meet him soon enough."

"My kind has been extinct for a long time, then," I observed, in a level tone. I had never found cause for despair in the knowledge that man was a product of evolution like any other, whose time would pass as surely as the Earth's, and the sun's, while aeons passed and the universe of stars endured.

"Its heritage endures," the android observed. "Everything your species learned was inherited by your successors, who continued to build upon it. Had you been less inclined to violence, you would have been the parents of the Engine, instead of its grandparents – but your achievements were not lost." This time, when the android spoke the word *successors* I thought of the giant creatures which had clustered about the Last Redoubt in the darkest of all my dreams, and the Shining Ones which followed their own mysterious path. *If there has always been truth in my dreams, I thought, then there must be monsters here: monsters uglier by far than that earthborn giant which tried to swallow me.*

"Can you show me the Central Sun of Creation?" I asked, pointing to the field of stars.

"I cannot," the metal man replied. "The universe is far greater than anyone in your time had any cause to think, and far stranger too. We will explain this as best we can."

"What of the Sea of Sleep, where souls go when death snatches them into the abyss of time?" I asked, but not very hopefully.

"There is no such artefact – yet. In time, we hope that the Archive will be perfected, but that of which you speak is at present a glimmer in the collective imagination of the Engines which will some day combine into the Universal Engine. That may come about even if the Consolidators have their way; they seek comfort in closure, but not in loss."

"And where," I enquired, "do you seek comfort?"

"We would not like to see a final end to *discomfort*,"

the scion said. "Our hope is infinity and progress eternal; ours is the neverending quest."

"Bravo," I said, softly.

I knew that I had no right to agree with him. Whatever they had held back from me, those who had sent me here were undoubtedly Transformers, eager to take what grip on future history they could. My duty was to them, to England and mankind, not to the mysterious Engine – which was, it seemed, at war with those who would render history unchangeable *and* those who sought to change it to their own advantage. If I were to find out what my commanding officers needed to know, I must seek enlightenment in the Archive which these impersonal creatures kept on some tiny orbital island to the east or west of the moon. That, I now assumed, was why I had been sent so far.

Unfortunately, it seemed that there were some individuals hereabouts that did not want me to do that: Transformers of distinctly different stripe. I wondered if I had seen their like before, in the Beast-gods and other Horrors which beset the House of the Borderland, in the monsters which overran the *Mortzestus*, in the Hog which visited Carnacki, and in the unspeakable creature which possessed poor Baumoff as he attempted to recapitulate the crucifixion and found himself forsaken.

"You mentioned overmen – humanity's successors," I said. "What were they?"

The android did not reach out a hand to touch the side wall, but the view from the false window changed. I found myself looking at a creature very like myself, lit by the frail light of a very different moon and stars far fewer in number.

"No huge-brained Hampdeshire Wonder, then," I murmured, with faint relief because the creature was no replica of Set, Destroyer of Souls. "I am delighted to see that *Homo superior* had the good grace to retain our form, and our idea of handsomeness."

"His kind lived among you from the very beginning," the android said, "often seen but never properly observed. Your legends knew them, but did not understand them, calling them vampires, werewolves or elves. They inherited the Earth when your own species destroyed itself, by means of wars fought with plagues – plagues to which your cousins had better immunity than your own masters attempted to reserve for themselves."

Do Hartley and Horniman know this already? I wondered. *Is this the context of the secret that I am supposed to winkle out? Am I supposed to find a way to avert this future war to end war – or am I supposed to find a means of winning it for humankind?*

"And these vampire overmen have been superseded in their turn?" I said. "They have no descendants save for intelligent machines?"

"That is true," said the android. "I am one of them – but I count you among my ancestors too, for I am the product of skill and art, not the rituals of germ plasm. We take care to preserve the history of the overmen too. Their own archives were devastated by a terrible disaster, which they called the Hail of Hell. Earth was hit by a storm of comets – but that was long ago. No such accident could ever happen again. The cometary halo is part of the

Engine's domain, the raw material of our industry."

The image of the not-quite-human being was replaced by the star-field. The half-circle of the moon was noticeably larger in apparent size, and displaced to one side. In the centre of the field of view was an object shaped like a thick-tyred wheel with a dozen spokes and a long spindle-like shaft piercing its hub. The spokes, the hub and the shaft were opaque and metallic but the bulbous rim was only opaque on its outward-facing surface; the inner was crystalline. It sparkled like a well-polished decanter by virtue of light reflected from a complex array of mirrors mounted on the shaft about which the wheel was spinning. Within the crystal there were hints of green and blue, even the occasional flash of red.

"The one who considers himself the keeper of the Archive calls it the Attic of Olympus," the android said. "We named it Utopia, but he did not like the name. He arrived here as you did, as a timeshadow, but he is a true scion of the Engine now."

"Why did he not return to his own time?" I asked.

"He fled from the moment of death," was the answer. "There was nothing left that could receive his returning intelligence."

"And what would have happened to his timeshadow had you not caught it?" I asked. "Did you save it from Heaven – or from Hell?"

"Even drug-assisted timeshadows are fleeting by nature," the scion assured me, carelessly dashing the fondest hopes of all religious men. "If they are let alone they dissolve within hours into the play of uncertainty, becoming part and parcel of the confusion which underlies order and nourishes life."

Before I could demand a fuller account of the "play of uncertainty" I found myself abruptly dispossessed of the weight which had kept me delicately anchored. I floated free, reflexively flailing my arms. As the android reached out and took hold of me, bidding me to be still, I realized that something had blazed into brilliance in the void: something that was now evaporating into a mist of angry light.



7 "What was that?" I demanded, as the android held me tight, anchoring me. The scion had not floated away from the floor, although I assumed that it too had lost what weight it had; I guessed that its feet must be held by magnetism.

"An attack," it replied, its perennial calmness now seeming inappropriate. "We had not thought that our rivals had any weapon close enough to fire at us, but it seems that we were wrong again. We shall not underestimate our enemies again."

I slumped in the creature's arms as my weight was abruptly restored, and was lowered back into the chair in which I had been sat before.

"Why should anyone try so very hard to kill me?" I demanded, roughly. "What harm can I do?"

"I do not yet know how to explain it in terms you can comprehend," the android said, carefully, "but the orderliness of the visible world is built on less orderly foun-

dations. The forces which bind atoms together are oddly mercurial, and there is an irreducible uncertainty about the behaviour of the fundamental particles. At that level of perception, causality may run backwards in time as well as forwards. On a grosser level, the counterflow is extremely tiny by comparison with the great tide which determines the directionality of time, and it is not easy for beings of our kind to exert any influence upon it – but it is not beyond the reach of such influences, as the possibility of your return to an earlier era implies. The integrity of the universe can tolerate all manner of eddies and undertows within that counterflow of causality, provided they remain tiny – but if they were to intensify, precarious order might turn to utter chaos. It is our belief that no such dissolution could be permanent, or even universal, but there are those who do not agree with that judgment – and there are, in any case, some who value their own individual endurance so highly that they are ruthless in opposing any decrease in the stability of local space-time.

"Your arrival here is, as an event in its own right, quite trivial, but if you can carry information back to your own time which alters the patterns of causality connecting past and future – even more so if that information assists others to follow your example and further recomplicate the patterns of connection – the tiny ripple might spread and grow. It is possible that an adventure like yours might be the seed of far greater disruptions. The Consolidators have killed others of your kind in the remote past, and must have hoped for three million years and more that they had put an end to the whole business of two-way traffic in time, at least so far as this tiny corner of the inflationary domain is concerned... but there are no ultimate ends in a domain like ours, any more than there are ultimate beginnings. We of the Engine understand that; the Consolidators and other Transformers do not.

"All the Consolidators and the greater number of the Transformers believe that disruptions of time can and ought to be knotted into closed circles of causality, rendered harmless as well as individually advantageous. They know that at the ultimate level of causality – that of the forces which hold atoms together and organize their transactions – there is an inherent and perhaps irreducible uncertainty, but they find the thought intolerable, and are prideful enough to think that the nature of things will ultimately capitulate with the demands of their intolerance."

"But you are enthusiastic to protect me," I said sceptically. "Because you are interested

in the past, and think I might have data to be added to your Archive. It seems a trivial reason, by comparison with the kinds of motives you have credited to your enemies. Are you champions of chaos, then, and enemies of order?"

"Some would certainly say so," the android admitted equably, "but we see things differently. We are interested in everything that happens, everything that is. We desire to live in a world in which the new and the unexpected are welcome. We desire to be creatures of a kind which eagerly anticipates surprise and does not live in mortal dread of fear. Surely that does not seem paradoxical to you?"

"It does seem strange in a machine," I observed.

"To us," said the android, "it seems strange that any competent machine could take another view."

I had lived the greater part of my life "in mortal dread of fear," and too much of the rest in mere dread of mor-



'A CREATURE VERY LIKE MYSELF.'

tality. I could easily have wished to be the kind of creature which lived in eager anticipation of surprise – but for the moment I had to be content with astonishment itself, and I felt strangely immune to that. The Engine's nanozoons might have given me strength and new powers of endurance, but they had not sharpened my blunted sensations. I could only wonder what I ought to be feeling, had I sensation enough to react like a human instead of a mere spectre. One thing, however, was obvious: in spite of avid giants and exploding missiles, this was a future far less desolate and doom-laden than those of which I had once been wont to dream.

The view from the false window informed me that were falling towards the crystalline inner surface of the floating wheel. I wondered what else would be here, alongside the Archive of humanity and its mysterious attendant. Earth had been "disputed territory" but this, apparently, was not. This was a haven of peace maintained by the protective Engine.

Then my attention was caught by a number of tiny points of light moving against the stellar background. They had to be close by; otherwise, even superhuman vision could not have apprehended them.

"Are there other vessels coming to meet us?" I asked.

"They are coming to defend us," the android said. "We do not know what our adversaries might do next, or to what extreme they might be prepared to go. We must assume that they knew your identity almost as soon as you gave the information to us; it is conceivable that the other name you mentioned means more to them than it does to us, for we have no record of General Hartley's involvement in experiments in time-travel. They did have some forewarning of the place where you appeared – or so it seems."

"Your Archive has no record of Hartley's secondment to Military Intelligence?" I queried.

"The reference sources we have are limited, and we cannot be sure that there are none in other hands which contain information that ours do not. If the Consolidators did have information about experiments in time travel conducted in remote antiquity, they would not be inclined to share it with the Engine. We might be better able to judge the seriousness of the situation if you could tell us more."

I hesitated, but I could not see the point of keeping trivial secrets twelve million years after the event. "There was another general," I confessed. "Sir Philip Horniman. A Brigadier Severn, and a Colonel Wrightman. A Captain MacLeod... and a nurse named Helen Flynn." I knew that I had left out the orderly corporal, but it seemed far more likely that they would have records of the careers and achievements senior officers.

"Thank you," said the android. Then it, too, hesitated before continuing. "We do not know why the Consolidators are so anxious to destroy you – if, indeed, it was Consolidators who set the trap and launched the missile – but it may be significant that official records claim that you died on April 17th, 1918. If you were to return safely to your own time, there ought to be some further record of your life and endeavours. Perhaps the Consolidators have decided that in order to protect the

integrity of our history, you must not be allowed to return to 1918."

I saw the implication that was being laid before me. "If you have no record of my subsequent life," I said, slowly, "and the erroneous account of my death was allowed to stand, then is it not an established fact that I *did not* return to my own time? Is it not *already* established that I *cannot* return, no matter how you might strive to defend me from my mysterious attackers?"

"That is not certain," said the man of metal carefully. "Our records are far from complete, being mere fragments dredged from the ruins of a dead civilization. The absence of any information as to your career after April 1918 may be a mere accident. On the other hand, if you do go back armed with valuable information about the shape of your future, your employers might well have felt it politic, after your return, to give you a new identity, leaving the record of your death unamended."

"But I have a wife!" I protested. "I could not let her think that I were dead, if I still lived!"

"We are merely listing possibilities," the android reminded me. "Nothing is certain, as yet."

As yet. The words echoed in my mind again, mocking me. I grappled with the tangled web of possibilities for a few moments more. "But what if I *were* to go back and correct the record?" I said. "What if I were to set out deliberately to alter the history recorded in your Archive? Could I possibly succeed? What would the consequences be?"

"Opinions differ," the metal man admitted. "The Consolidators fear annihilation by virtue of the erasure of the chains of cause and effect which produced them. The most extreme among them fear that the entire inflationary domain might be annihilated along with them."

"But surely," I said, "if travelling in time is possible – as it clearly is – then the method of displacement is bound to be discovered over and over again. What good can it do, in the long term, to destroy one time-traveller, or even a thousand?"

"There are some who believe the extirpation of all timeshadow-casting species to be a sacred mission of true intelligence," the android said. "The essence of the philosophy of Consolidation is the notion that the ultimate survivor in the universal struggle for existence will be the collective which takes control of uncertainty, eliminating it from consideration by creating a universe in which causality can only flow in one direction. The Consolidators' aim is to rid the tide of time of all its subsidiary disturbances – and if that involves taking control of the transactions of the subatomic particles and rewriting the laws of nature, that is what they intend to do."

"Transformers accept that the domain is in a constant state of flux, due to the continual extirpation of histories by irruptions of reversed causality. They believe that a final state of order could only be achieved if and when the primal moment were to be reshaped in such a way that it gives rise to a universe consolidated from its very inception. The more radical among them desire to prevent that reshaping in order to maintain the creativity of the domain, and its fecundity in spawning daughter domains. The most extreme are ambitious to become

mass-producers of new inflationary domains, active practitioners of mutation in the physical laws developed by those domains, and masters of universal evolution."

"Is there no one in this hectic world who has ambitions less than godlike?" I asked.

"Very few," the creature said. "When your successors put away their flesh they also put away the limitations of the flesh. When death is no longer a necessity, the scope of realizable ambition inevitably increases by an order of magnitude that one of your kind would have to consider godlike. On the other hand, the universe is home to many worlds like Earth; although humanity is long gone, there are other creatures approaching the same transient stage of their development – some of them, no doubt, possessed of the same perverse gifts of nature. Their ambitions, I dare say, would fit the narrow margin that you consider *less than godlike*."

"What do you mean by *perverse gifts of nature*?" I wanted to know, although I had an inkling already.

"The ability to cast timeshadows," the other replied, equably. "And with that ability, it seems, the ability to spark conflicts beyond your comprehension."

By now we were descending into the span of the great wheel. The space beyond the false window was filled by a curving plain of crystal, like a vast trough roofed over in the manner of a greenhouse.

"We must hope that it will serve well enough as a fortress," my friendly captor replied. "Given recent developments, even the Engine might be hard-pressed to keep the barbarians from its walls."



8 The truth of the machine's words became evident as soon as it spoke, for the image on the wall immediately became blurred, and then disintegrated altogether. The wall itself seemed to be cracking and blistering, and the delicate traceries of blue and black were losing their distinctiveness.

"What is happening?" I asked my companion – but it seemed that the mysterious infection had spread into its body, for the smooth metallic surface was becoming pitted, as if with rust, and the semblance of human form was beginning to melt into shapelessness.

"Don't be afraid," it said, by way of answer – but how could I be expected to remain calm and confident when everything around me seemed to be on the brink of disintegration and there was nothing without but the void?

Even so, I did feel unreasonably calm. My fear, such as it was, seemed purely intellectual; my strangely-augmented phantom body resisted all the commonplace symptoms of dread. If I had a stomach at all, it was not nauseated; if my false skin had sweat-glands, they remained inactive.

I tried to rise from the chair, but found that I could not. My arms were stuck to the rests, while the seat and back were flowing around my shoulders and thighs.

"You will be... pro-tec-ted," the android promised, as black corrosion swallowed up its surface and its shape alike, almost obliterating the impressionistic mouth before whatever mechanism was within its head could

complete the sentence. Ordinarily, my reflex would have been to fight against enclosure, but the situation was so utterly incomprehensible that I made an effort to relax. The material which had comprised the chair was now perfectly fluid, like molten candle-wax, and it flowed around me in a matter of seconds, closing off my hands and face before becoming more viscous again. For a second time I lost the sensation of my own weight, but this time I did not float free; I was held securely by a rapidly-setting cocoon.

I felt my supple shell draw me into an erect position, with my arms flat to my sides, almost as if I were reflexively answering a call to attention. The fact that I could not feel my own mass reminded me that I was in a dream, and that my "actual" body was lying on a bed in a remote house in the west of Ireland, but I no longer felt confident that I could regain possession of that body. I had sometimes had the impression in my visionary dreams that I was flying through time and space into distant epochs and remote regions of the cosmos, but I had never felt as thoroughly disconnected from my own time and space as I did now, locked into my plastic prison.

For a few moments, after I had lowered my eyelids in reflexive response to the seeming threat to my eyes, I could see nothing at all – but then I heard a whisper which must have been loosed directly into the recesses of my ear, saying: "Open your eyes and you will see."

I opened my eyes, and found that I could see, although there was something strange about the world upon which I gazed. Its colours seemed too vivid, its shapes too well-defined. I seemed to stand on the floor of the narrow room I had been in before, but its walls had vanished, leaving me in a brightly-lit cavernous space cluttered with bizarre machinery.

The roofless expanse was infinitely greater and more complex than any factory floor I had ever been on, but what struck me most of all was its astonishing cleanliness. Although the machines were intricate in the extreme, and were certainly not dead although they had few moving parts by comparison with a textile mill or a munitions plant, there was not a hint of dirt or spillage. I would have liked to study the machines, but even as I looked curiously around, the floor beneath my feet began to devour my encased form. I had no sense of falling – I was still devoid of weight – and was convinced that I was indeed being drawn down into the seemingly-solid mass. Even before my head was swallowed up the image before my eyes was abruptly altered, and I took the inference that it was a product of some hyper-kinematographic artifice, like the image in the false window.

Now I was looking out over an arching landscape, which I took to be the interior of the floating wheel: a landscape which remained perfectly steady even though I am sure that my body was turned head over heels, and set to rapid lateral movement. The vegetation was not as disorderly as the plain into which I had first been delivered by my leap through time. It was more obviously under control, more *decorous*. Its trees were spaced like those in an orchard rather than clustering like wild woodland, and the flowering bushes whose

hedges wound around the stands of trees looked as if they had been neatly pruned. The treeless hills in the middle distance were gently rounded, with no crag or scree to be seen. The colours were still too bright, and the shapes were too distinct – especially those of distant objects which ought to have been blurred.

"It is a picture," said the whisper in my ear, as if it had somehow divined my scepticism. "You will see the reality soon enough. The Engine itself has been infiltrated, but the infection will soon be cleansed. You are safe, and we shall do everything in our power to keep you safe." I was not reassured by this; if the last four years had made one lesson abundantly clear it was that destruction is a far easier business than creation. The eternal battle between the forces of annihilation and salvation is far from evenly matched; far inferior forces can wreak terrible havoc, if destruction is their only aim and they are careless of their own survival.

I still could not quite believe that my humble presence could urge such forces to action in a world twelve million years after my own time. I tried to be glad that the mysterious assembly of machines which called itself the Engine seemed prepared to go to any lengths to make me safe, but I could not help wondering what motive it had, and whether I could lend the slightest credence to any account of its motives that it might condescend to offer me. I would have spoken to the whispering voice if I could, but my closed lips were tightly sealed.

"We have merged with the hub of the wheel," the voice said. "You will be delivered to the habitable surface as soon as it is safe. Do not be afraid."

I was not afraid, save in some abstract intellectual sense; it seemed to me that my curiosity was far more piquant than my fear. I wondered whether my years in Belgium and northern France had finally brought me to a psychological redoubt, from whose patiently-hollowed trenches fear had been conclusively banished. I struggled to make good use of the moment unexpectedly made available for reflection.

I knew that the Engine must have a reason for wanting to keep me safe. It clearly intended to send me back to my own time, if it could, and must have some notion of what effect my return would have. Presumably, the Engine wanted to protect its own existence while weakening the tenure of its various rivals, especially the unexpectedly-resourceful Consolidators. But how did it propose to achieve this? Had it grounds to believe that furtherance of the causes to which my own duty would incline me when I returned – the salvation of humankind from the destructive effects of more "world wars" and eventual supersession by a cousin species – would work to its own advantage? Did the fact that the Consolidators were so anxious to exterminate me lend further credence to that supposition?

I found it more difficult to believe in anarchist machines than it had ever been to accept the existence of human ones – and yet, as I pondered the matter, I began to wonder whether vulnerable creatures compounded of flesh and blood had not infinitely more reason to count control and safety as cardinal virtues than any mere "scion" of some vast, protean and impersonal

machine. Were not most human beings natural Consolidators, albeit very inefficient ones? Was not the average man possessed by a desperate desire to carve whatever safety and prosperity he could from the constant barrage mounted by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune?

I could not help but wonder whether I might have fallen into the hands of the wrong party in this conflict. I only had the Engine's word for the fact that the Consolidators wanted to destroy me; perhaps they too wanted to lecture me and to use their powers of persuasion to convert me to their cause, so that when I went back in time I would act in *their* interests as well as the interests of humankind. How would I ever know, if I only heard the Engine's side of the story? And was I not being optimistic to think that either side might restrict itself to mere persuasion as a means of my employment?

The cocoon encasing my body flowed away from my face to release my eyes and mouth – but it did not flow away entirely. It became, as it had been before, a chair, and as it left me it folded me neatly into a sitting posture upon its well-upholstered cushions. I felt solid again, and possessed of a sensible measure of weight.

The room in which I found myself seemed in total contrast to the one in which I had previously been confined, although I was hesitant, at first, to trust the evidence of my eyes on that or any other score. The ceiling was high and the windows were very tall, filling the space with abundant light, although my own position was shadowed. There were many such shadowed coverts, because huge bookshelves jutted out at regular intervals from walls that were themselves covered from top to bottom with row upon row of neatly-bound volumes. I could not make any estimate of the total number of the volumes housed therein but I felt sure that there were far more books here than I had ever seen in one place before.

Standing a few feet away, not shadowed at all, was a tall man in a neatly-tailored coat and well-pressed trousers. He was wearing a cravat and his long hair had been carefully styled; he was carrying a book in his right hand.

"Lieutenant Hodgson," he said airily. "I cannot tell you how delighted I am to have human company at last after having waited so long. Do you, by any chance, know who I am?"

I only hesitated for a moment before saying: "No, I do not." When I had watched faint expressions of vexation and sadness flit across his soft features, however, I added: "But I know who you resemble."



9 My answer made him smile. His teeth were very white and neatly-aligned; the image contained in his timeshadow, which the Engine's nanozoons had presumably laboured very carefully to reproduce in every detail, was not entirely honest.

"Yes," he said. "You are absolutely right. They told you, I dare say, that I call this celestial hidey-hole the Attic of Olympus – but it is clever of you to have guessed the reason."

I stood up, partly because I wanted to appraise him on equal terms, and partly because I wanted to be free of my over-solicitous chair. I extended my hand to be shaken, and he transferred his book from one hand to the other in order that he might take mine. No sooner had he released my hand than he gave me the book to hold instead.

"I have been attending to my homework," he said.

The book was bound in black, with gold leaf on its spine. My surname was at the top, and beneath it the title: *The House on the Borderland and Other Novels*. I felt a curious thrill at the realization that my work had somehow survived twelve million years, outlasting the human race itself. Given the total number of volumes in the room, I had no right to feel uniquely privileged, but it was a precious intimation of immortality to one who had struggled all his life to find publishers for his more ambitious work.

"How many posthumous volumes have you added to the shelves yourself, Mr Wilde?" I asked instead – fully cognizant of the fact that it was a wretchedly inept conversational gambit.

"Too many," he said, "but only one that you will have time to read, alas. And you must call me Oscar, although I am merely the incorruptible image of my former self, secured in my attic by the cunning artifice of gods who love beauty while my decayed body rots in the soil of old Earth. I hardly think that corruption can have left so much as a chip of bone by now, do you? I would not like to think that I had become a fossil, when my atoms might have been returned to the stream of life: to the feathers of birds and the petals of flowers."

"I was told that men of vivid imagination made the best time-travellers," I said, "but they would not tell me who had set forth before me. Indeed, they told me virtually nothing, lest it prejudice my expectations."

"I, on the other hand," said the image of Oscar Wilde, "shall be happy to reveal something of the history of your predecessors, in the hope that you might be able satisfy my own curiosity regarding an intriguing puzzle." He half-turned and pointed a well-manicured finger at a desk, upon whose cluttered red-leather top two sheaves of manuscript had been set.

"I am certain that you will find them interesting – and very intriguing. But first, may I ask you how you feel?"

"Quite well," I told him, "considering that I appear to have been the focus of a considerable battle, and that I have been shut up in some kind of cocoon for at least half an hour. I presume that my freedom from pain is so comforting that it blots out all other possible sensation. I am not afraid, although I suppose I have every right to be, nor am I unduly overawed, although I certainly ought to be."

"You are not tired, of course," he observed, "nor have you the slightest desire to eat or drink – and the absence of such sensations seemed to you to be so unremarkable that you left them out of account. I, on the other hand, have taken great care to preserve the possibilities of hunger and fatigue."

Instead of joining my new host at the desk I went to the nearest window and looked out. I found myself looking down from an improbably great height at a wide-flung array of roofs, balconies, skylights and parapets which even such a builder of stately pleasure domes as



'THEY HAD FEW MOVING PARTS.'

Coleridge's Kubla Khan would surely have thought excessive. Nor did we appear to be at the very top of the edifice, which must have been at least a thousand feet tall. The hedges separating the myriad flower-gardens formed a vast maze which stretched almost to the limit of vision. There was no horizon; the landscape curved up instead of down, its appearance decaying into a misty blur within which I could just make out a few mountainous ridges. A single continuous watercourse wound its way through the gardens, although there were a number of isolated rectangular pools. The sky was remarkably bright, its light unevenly distributed into a cloud-shrouded trellis of radiance which obscured every trace of the metal framework holding its gargantuan panes together.

"I had been told that you lived alone," I murmured, to cover up the fact that I had been so easily taken aback.

"I do," said Wilde, a little mournfully. "Had I company, I would not need a palace. Had I good company, I might even be content with a mere cottage. Ostentation is not the best counterweight to tedium, by any means, but it has its uses and its charms. When time and energy are no obstacle, the imagination naturally runs to excess."

"But the Engine has its mock-human scions, has it not?" I said, stepping back from the window, "and the entire solar system is at war, it seems. Can life here be so very tedious?"

"The war extends far beyond the limits of the solar system," said Wilde, "and the Engine would provide guests for every room in the house, if I were disposed to hold a party or a costumed ball. Interesting people all – individuality and idiosyncrasy are easy to manufacture, when one has the resources of the Engine – but not quite the perfect audience, to one of my stubbornly old-fashioned sensibilities. Having had a very long time to ponder the matter, I have become a hardened Darwinist, aesthetically speaking. People deliberately shaped by gods in one's own image seem somehow less *worthy* than people shaped by natural selection; randomness contrived, no matter how assiduously, remains a matter of contrivance. Perhaps I should not care, but I do, and am perversely glad of it. I do find the scions a little tedious, and the war even more so."

I came to stand beside him at the desk and picked up one of the manuscripts. Its headsheet was inscribed with a title: *The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires*; it was signed, with a very obvious flourish, *Lucian, Count Lugard*. Without replacing it, I looked down at the other, which bore the title *The Black Blood of the Dead* and the signature *Sebastian Melmoth*. I knew that Sebastian Melmoth was the pseudonym Wilde had adopted while living in France after his release from prison.

"Should you not have reverted to your own signature, Mr Wilde?" I asked him. "Surely you no longer have any reason to employ a pseudonym?"

"If I were certain of who and what I am," said the person who had asked me to call him Oscar, "I would have more confidence in signing my work. You might understand when you have read it why I say that – but you should read the other first, for mine is but a sequel."

"And you are not Lucian, Count Lugard?"

"No," he said, "I am not. Tell me, Lieutenant Hodgson – did you and the man I resemble ever meet?"

"No," I answered. "I was 23, having spent much of the previous seven years at sea, when Oscar Wilde died – but I have spoken to people who did know you, and you certainly have not been forgotten in 1918."

"That I know," he said. "Take time to read, now, if you will. You will find that your enhanced powers of perception will make it easy to do. I shall return in good time."

So saying, he strode towards one of the shadowed coverts, where I saw a door that I had not noticed before. He nodded to me before passing through it and closing it behind him, but I was too slow to answer the gesture. It did not occur to me until he was gone that there were a thousand questions I ought to have asked, whose answers I ought to have been burning to know. Now that I had entered into surroundings which had been shaped to give the impression of safety, comfort and near-familiarity I seemed incapable, at least for the moment, of feeling any real urgency.

"Well," I murmured, "I came here to be educated, and time is pressing."

I carried the first manuscript back to the no-longer-ominous chair, and did not hesitate to set myself down thereupon.

I began to read.



10 Oscar Wilde's graven image was correct in his estimation of my enhanced powers of concentration. I was able to lay the first manuscript down after an interval which seemed to be no more than half a hour – there was no clock in the library, so I could not keep a proper account of the time. When I had finished the first manuscript I could have taken up the second immediately; I felt not the slightest hint of any physical cramp or stiffness. I did not do so; my mind was restless even if my body was not, and I was curious to know what else this remarkable library held. I stood up and went to the nearest set of bookshelves.

The fact that they towered over me to such an inordinate extent gave the books a more awesome substance than they might otherwise have possessed, but they would have had authority enough simply by virtue of their number and their astounding endurance. The whole heritage of human understanding was here! This was our monument, our contribution to the evolution of intellect and to the wisdom of the species that came after us! How long would it take to read through it all? Had Wilde's immortal simulacrum yet had the time and inclination to do that – or had it rationed itself, preferring to keep a precious residuum of ignorance for future address? Then I remembered that the Talos-creature had had no book in which to look up my name, and yet he had recovered information associated with that name almost as soon as I had spoken. I looked around again, with a slightly different gaze, realizing that it was wrong to think of this strangely stocked and distorted library as something separate from the figure that had left me alone within it. The room and the android were

part and parcel of the same phenomenon: the same calculated echo of a world long gone.

Could all this be for my benefit? I wondered. Was it all devised and erected while I was aboard that strange vessel, for the sole purpose of making me comfortable, of providing me with an impression of surroundings which were not merely intelligible but seductive? Might this monumental edifice, and the worldlet which contains it be nothing but a stage erected to lull me into a false sense of...

The train of thought was derailed by the impossibility of adding the word *security* – and I could not imagine what other false sense the inhabitants of this astonishing future might be trying to induce in me, or why. I began to move from shelf to shelf, scanning the titles. I found books on sciences of which I had never heard – electronics, tribology, quantum mechanics – and took some down to riffle through their pages, marvelling at the intricate diagrams and enigmatic mathematical formulas. I began actively to search for books on history, but had not found that particular section when the library door opened and closed again.

The entity which resembled Oscar Wilde came to meet me, smiling broadly. The real Wilde's teeth had been spoiled by the mercury treatment he had been forced to take after contracting syphilis from a college whore at Oxford. This machine was Wilde re-cast as Dorian Gray, magically incorruptible by any conceivable existence, but even he acknowledged, in referring to his home as the Attic of Olympus, that he was more like the portrait – once Dorian had reclaimed the burden of his corruption into his own dead body – than the living man.

"Did you find the tale amusing?" he said.

"Vaguely," I replied, "but I cannot imagine why you should offer me a work of fiction to read, when I have come so far. There must be a great deal of knowledge on these shelves which I could usefully transport back to 1918."

"Is it so obviously a work of fiction?" he asked, although the manner of his asking suggested that he knew that it was.

"Very obviously," I said. "There was no real person resident in Baker Street on whom Conan Doyle modelled his most famous character."

"The Archive is reasonably unambiguous on that point," Wilde's simulacrum admitted. "Is there anything else in the manuscript that you know, beyond the shadow of a doubt, to be untrue? Did you ever hear of Lugard's name mentioned, in London or Paris?"

"No," I said. "Most of the other characters are based on real persons, of course, but I

never heard of Lugard – or Copplestone."

"Never?" he repeated. His voice was very anxious.

"So far as I can recall," I confirmed, hesitantly – but something that had temporarily slipped my mind rose again to the surface and I hastened to correct my false denial. "Wait! Yes, I believe I did hear Copplestone's name spoken, once. It was while I was in the ambulance, on my way to the house in Ireland."

"What was said?" asked Wilde. "Please try to remember the exact words."

"Wrightman and MacLeod were speaking. One of them was chiding the other for not fetching me sooner; the other was defensive. *He's strong, the defensive one said, stronger, I dare say, than you or I, and certainly stronger than Copplestone was when he opened the way.* Then they went on to argue over the implications of my wounds. Why are you so anxious to know?"

"I will explain that when you have read the other manuscript," he assured



"I CALL THIS... THE ATTIC OF OLYMPUS."

me. "Suffice it to say, for now, that I remember that evening at Copplestone's house very well. I remember the detective with grey eyes and his fussy friend. I remember Lugard, and the rumours that had been spread about his vampiric inclinations, and I remember Ned Copplestone, and all that had been said of him. Lugard was only notorious, but Copplestone was, in his own sphere, quite famous."

The Wilde-machine was telling me that his own history had been changed: that the fears expressed by Copplestone in the course of the count's story had been justified, and that some of the key players in the little drama had been wiped out, leaving no trace behind save for the detective's supposed avatar, the greatest of the *Strand*'s multitudinous heroes. The graven image which stood before me was claiming that he was not even the semblance of a man long dead, but of some alternative version of that man, who had lived in a subtly different world with a slightly different human population. But if that history had been wiped out, how could he be here? Should he not have vanished from existence as soon as his own history had been cancelled out?

This is a dream, after all, I reminded myself. In a dream, the pattern of events is perfectly free to make no sense, and to defy any explanation. And yet, I am obliged to try to make sense of it.

I looked at my tall and handsome companion, speculatively. "What would happen if the Engine's enemies were to win the battle that is supposedly raging in the vacuum of deep space, and send me back equipped to change history in some grandiose fashion?" I asked him. "Would you and this whole worldlet vanish? Might the Engine itself disappear, because its earliest ancestor was never built?"

"I would dearly like to know the answer to that question," my companion admitted, "and if the Engine were capable of greater feeling, it would probably be prey to a desire far more fervent than even I can entertain."

"The Engine's scion gave me the impression that it had nothing but contempt for the schemes of its adversaries," I told him, "and the precipitation of such vast changes does not seem to sit well with the idea of *Consolidators*."

"The Engine is no more capable of contempt than of fervour in desire," he replied, "but it is capable of desire, and of curiosity too. As to the likelihood of *Consolidators* making vast changes – that surely depends on exactly

what they are trying to consolidate."

"When shall I read your own story?" I asked, thinking that the sooner the task was out of the way the sooner I would be able to interrogate him about the Engine's schemes.

"In a little while," he said. "First, I must follow the instructions which the Engine has issued. I do resent its insistence on treating me as if I were merely one of its scions, but I do not like to hurt its feelings, shallow though they are." He extended his arm to indicate that I should precede him to the door, and I moved obediently towards it.

"The Engine seems very enthusiastic to show me what it has done for you," I remarked, as I opened the door.

"Yes it is," said Wilde, "but you judge it in the right way, or you might be seriously misled about the nature of the lure which is being dangled before you."

"Lure?" I echoed – realizing that in my attempts to reason out the Engine's motives I had only been thinking one move ahead, when I ought to have been trying to anticipate two.

If the Engine succeeded in sending me back to 1918, the possibility would then be opened up for me to come forward in time again to an even more distant future than this, and to become the kind of creature that Wilde already was. What the Engine presumably intended to offer me in return for my co-operation with its schemes was a kind of immortality – and my own Utopia in which to spend millions of years of life.

It was not merely the opportunity to return home that I stood to lose if the wrong side won the struggle that was raging around me, or if I failed to make the most of whatever opportunity I might be given.

Disembodied souls, I had been assured, were more ephemeral than living men; the only humanly accessible Heaven was here, in the future empire of clever machinery – or so the Engine wanted me to believe.

To be concluded next month

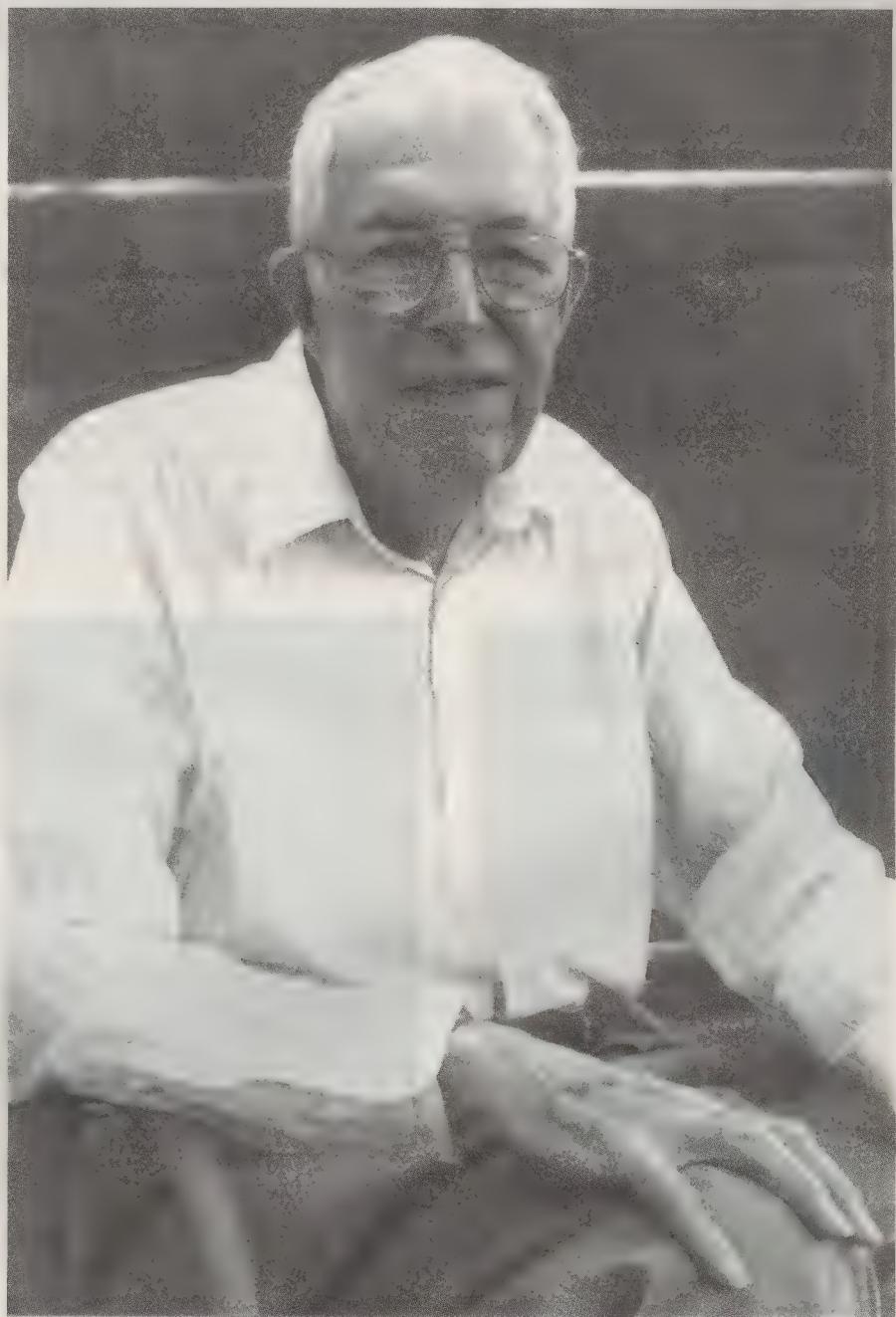
Brian Stableford, born 1948, recently turned 50 and announced that he has become serene. The two short novels which preceded the above one were "The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires" (*Interzone* issues 91-92, January-February 1995) and "The Black Blood of the Dead" (*Interzone* issues 115-116, January-February 1997). The trilogy reaches its long-awaited completion next month.

Few writers can approach the stature of Jack Williamson, a man whose career spans almost exactly 70 years: this magazine is appearing in December 1998, and his first short story, "The Metal Man," was in the December 1928 issue of Hugo Gernsback's pioneering science-fiction monthly *Amazing Stories*. Born in 1908, a near-contemporary of John W. Campbell, Jr., and Robert A. Heinlein, Williamson has set the standard for the genre with such works as *The Legion of Space* (serialized 1934; in book form, 1947), *The Legion of Time* (serialized 1938; in book form, 1952), *The Humanoids* (1949), *Star Bridge* (with James E. Gunn, 1955), *Bright New Universe* (1967), *The Moon Children* (1972), *Brother to Demons*, *Brother to Gods* (1979), *Firechilde* (1986) and *Mazeway* (1990). Named a *Grand Master of Science Fiction* by the *Science Fiction Writers of America* in 1975, Williamson continues to produce thought-provoking work, with his most recent book, *Silicon Dagger*, published in late 1998.

An Amazing, Astounding Seventy Years!

Jack Williamson

interviewed by Jayme Lynn Blaschke



Picture: Betty Williamson

Silicon Dagger is your 52nd novel. The book's themes - right-wing extremists and militia movements - are something of a departure for you. This is not the type of book you've become known for.

Yes, it's less science-fictional, because it's closer to the present time, and present-day problems.

What made you decide to take on these ideas?

I voted Libertarian in the last couple of elections just as a sort of protest vote, because I wasn't very happy with the Republicans and the Democrats and Ross Perot. The idea was really touched off by the Oklahoma City bombing, Ruby Ridge and Waco, the Texas independence movement. It so concerned me about the future stability of the country. In the story, a group of malcontents in a Kentucky county declare their independence and defend it. Then their goal is to set up sort of an island of refuge for democracy and freedom and culture in a world that looks about to break up.

That's a scenario that's all too real in the United States these days. What's your own personal opinion of these groups?

Well, I can sympathize with the desire for freedom and independence and freedom from excessive government regulation. On the other hand, our survival depends on an organized, functioning social system, and most of them have programmes that would break it up. I'm a spectator rather than a participant. That process to me is fascinating and rather

alarming. I can see the need for an island of refuge. The idea is not entirely new. Many years ago I wrote a *Startling Stories* novel called *The Fortress of Utopia* that has much the same theme. Not a very good novel, I'm afraid. It's never been reprinted, but the idea appeals to me.

What were you able to do in The Silicon Dagger, written in the '90s, that you weren't able to in The Fortress of Utopia, written in the '30s?

This one is closer to reality. That one was set in the future, and hastily written for half a cent a word without any real inspiration. I was trying to make a living as a pulp writer and writing anything I could sell, even for half a cent.

Why do you think all these extremist groups, these militia groups are popping up now? It's only been the last five, ten years where they've started gaining attention.

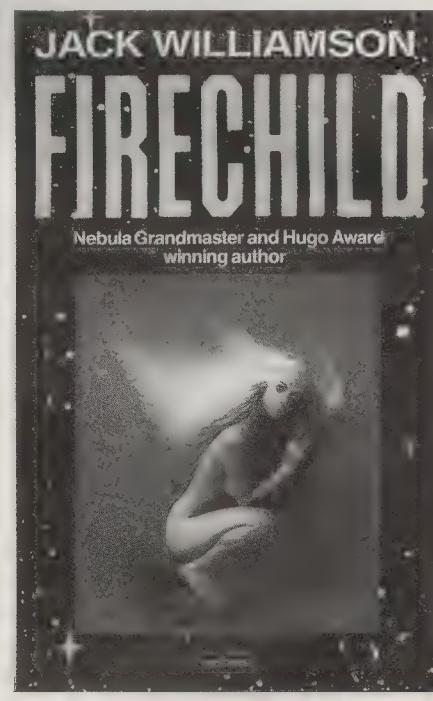
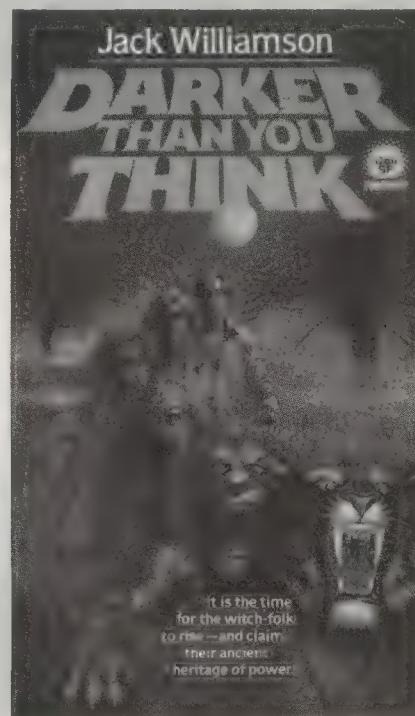
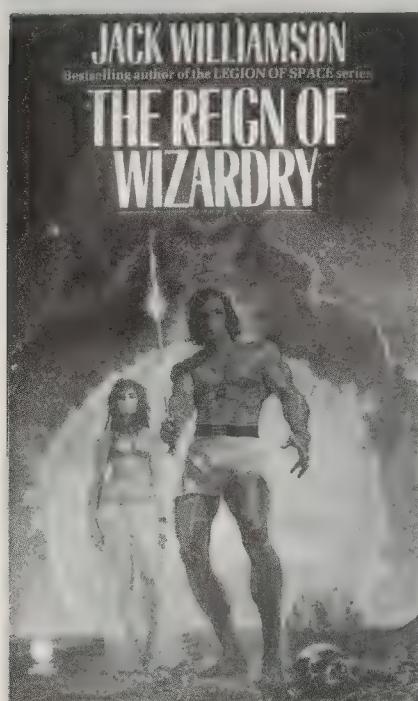
Well, my theory in the novel is that all this is a result of the information revolution. In fact, the title briefly means that information technology is a silicon dagger, threatening the survival of all the old authorities. There's an element of truth there. Copy machines and computers, radio and TV and such media inform populations under dictatorships, and spread discontent and awareness of something better. They undermine the social propaganda machines. It's a complicated idea, and I don't understand all the ramifications of it. Nobody does. It's hard to know where we're headed, but we're going somewhere.

*At the forefront of the information revolution was the cyberpunk movement, but for the most part it concerned itself more with technological ramifications. Content was largely ignored. I was a fascinated reader of Gibson's *Neuromancer*, and I used to be a fascinated reader of the *Black Mask* mystery stories of the late '20s and early '30s by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. What Gibson did was to translate these into a modern setting. They both feature lone-wolf heroes in conflict with corrupt authority. In those early novels the hero was a white knight, but Gibson's are all victims of the information revolution, of change, of sophisticated technological progress controlled by big capital groups, corporations and so forth. They're motivated by greed more than anything else. And of course, Chandler was a stylist, and Gibson is a stylist I admire. Gibson just jumped the genre into the future, more on the basis of intuition, I think, than on any sociological speculation. I think he wrote the book on a typewriter and not on a computer.*

Who are some current writers out there that you're impressed with?

I don't keep up with them well at all. I taught Gibson's three cyberpunk novels with great admiration, but when I'm working on a story of my own, it's difficult to get involved with anybody else's. Another novel I taught and enjoyed was *Doomsday Book* by Connie Willis. I think that's really magnificent.

Do you still teach?



Yes, at Eastern New Mexico University. I was on the regular faculty there for close to 20 years. I retired in '77 officially, but I've been teaching a course with a friend, Dr Patrice Caldwell – team-teaching it – every spring for about 10 years, alternating between creative writing and science fiction, which I still enjoy.

Let's jump back the other way. What are some older writers who aren't read as much as they probably should be any more?

H.G. Wells is the writer I feel shaped modern science fiction. He had studied biology under Thomas Henry Huxley, who was Darwin's chief spokesman. That gave him – he understood evolution, which gave him a handle on change and the future. Which was something new to the field and an essential part of science fiction. In science fiction, we explore the impacts of technological change. If you look at *The Time Machine*, most of Wells' work, in fact, that's what he was doing, looking at history in terms of evolutionary change. He wrote a little book called *The Discovery of the Future* that was the beginning of futurology. He did his best writing, however, before he got too much interested in intellectual approaches to it. *The Sleeper Wakes* has too much serious extrapolation to be a good novel. The earlier novels, where his imagination went freely, are his really great works. Later, I was influenced by John Campbell. Heinlein was a good friend of mine, a man I admired greatly. He's the Great American science-fiction writer. When

*I can sympathize
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government regulation.*

I got into the field, you could still read everything that everybody wrote, and you knew the majority of people who were writing. Nowadays, so many writers are doing fine work for legions of readers, that it's impossible to keep up with them all.

You've been writing longer than most people out there have been reading. As a writer, what have you found to be the advantages of age?

I've been more concerned with the disadvantages! I've always been in competition with younger, brighter, better-educated people, and scrambling to keep up. On the other hand, I've been fascinated with science, the

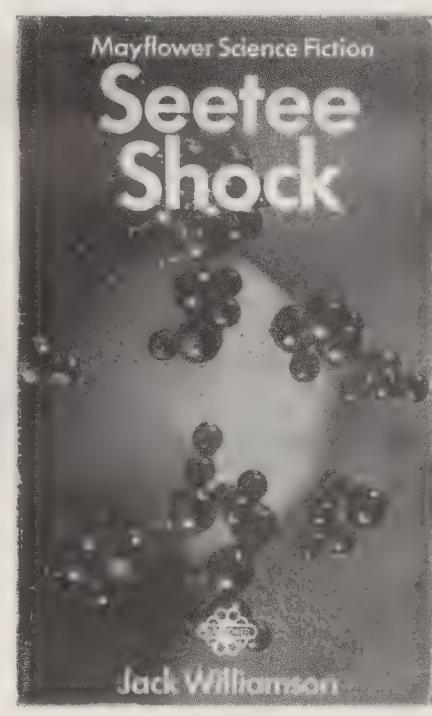
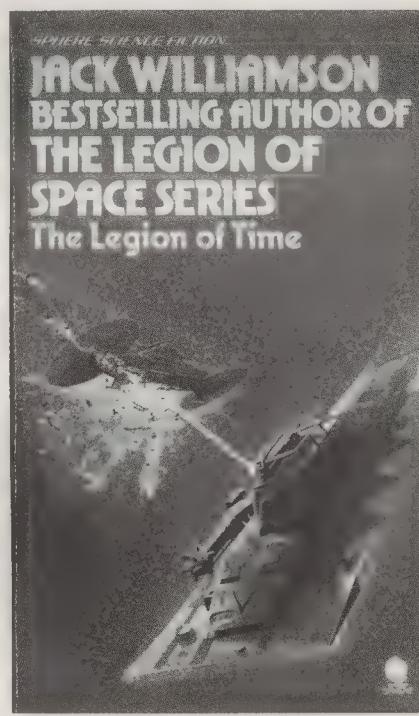
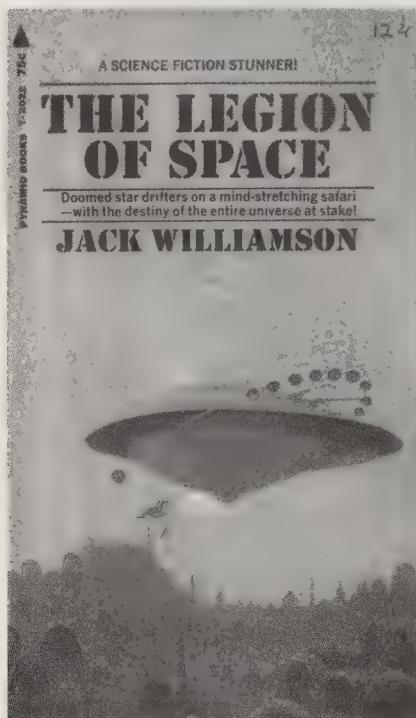
revelation of the universe – the large universe and the small universe, the evolution of life and its possible future. So there's always a new realm of speculation beyond what we know, or think we know. I attempt to keep up as best I can. Nobody can really be a Renaissance Man any more, but I wish I were. And there are new, able writers coming on the field all the time. I read book reviews and look at books and now and then read one, but not very many of them.

You've seen everything from the first satellite launch to the cloning of a sheep, everything in between as well as before and after. Is it harder now to keep up with science today than it was 50 years ago?

I'm not sure. There was always a lot to learn. To me, it's a sort of a mystery story. The universe, as we see it, is a great riddle we'd like to understand. Every issue of *Science* or *Scientific American* or *Science News* or *Astronomy* or whatever is just another chapter of the story. I'm fascinated to read it. So it is recreation, what I love to do, to keep up as best I can with what we know about it, and what we can anticipate. It's an exciting time to be alive. I wish I could live another century.

In today's reality, it's possible for a writer to write something that's cutting-edge, but by the time the story sees print, it's already been done in a laboratory. Do you consider the rapid pace of scientific advance a hindrance to good sf writing or an asset?

Good science fiction is the result of...



let's say a strong personal reaction to what's happening. If it's a good story, it'll have character values and thematic interest and narrative drive that will be there after the science changes. Too, cosmology and many other sciences are becoming too recondite for the average reader to understand. Science has become indistinguishable from magic in the popular mind. Actually, the science background and relevance to truth is just a bridge into the story, or a springboard. Once you get it going, what matters are the characters, the plot, the philosophy behind the theme, the characters as reacting human beings. So, if the story's valid to human nature, it doesn't really matter all that much in the long run if the science is outdated.

Speaking of which, one of your more popular works is the series you co-wrote with Fred Pohl, The Starchild Trilogy. Those books had more big ideas crammed into them than most books written before or since. You had sentient stars, a steady-state universe – the list just goes on and on.

I loved the steady-state universe. It had no limits – no beginning, no end. You didn't have to worry about origins. I loved the idea of continuous creation, the reefs of space and possible biological evolution. It was great fun to do. We had the organ bank, organ transplants. I started working on the original novel in the early '40s. I wrote a draft myself before Fred got to work on it. We did beat Dr Christian Barnard by about four years for the first heart transplant, but I was worried for a while we were going to be outrun by science. The books have sold a lot of copies since we've had to give up the steady-state universe, so that didn't kill the value of it. Even now, I'd be glad if somebody came up with an alternative explanation to the Big Bang, though it seems to be on firmer ground every day.

As a writer, what are you capable of doing today that you weren't when you started out?

I hope I'm a better writer. I know more tricks of the trade. I know more science. But the wonderful thing about science fiction has always been that there were no taboos. You could say anything you wanted to say, so long as you embodied it in an entertaining story. Or perhaps that may not be strictly true. I heard Heinlein say once that Campbell didn't want him to do mature sexual relationships, though when you look at Heinlein's later work, you may wonder what is a mature sexual relationship.



Any examples where you've used this freedom science fiction offers?

I've never been much of a revolutionary. I've very seldom wanted to break any taboos. I've just felt total freedom to say anything I wanted.

What are the rewards of writing?

To me, I guess the greatest reward is the satisfaction of creating. Shaping a story and getting it on paper in the form it ought to have. I've never written bestsellers or made a great deal of money at it, but when I look back, I've been able to spend most of my life

doing something I enjoyed. When I look at people around me, many of them are working at dollar jobs, at jobs they hate, jobs that bore them. For me it's been largely rewarding. Of course, writing is hard work, sitting at the typewriter or computer and pounding the keys. For many years as a pulp writer trying desperately to make a living, I worked on stories that were ill-conceived or failed to say something I wanted to say and came to no good end. In recent years I've had more freedom to write only what I wanted to write. A story doesn't work unless it's something you really believe. The reader won't believe it if you don't. Won't be interested if you're not interested. My files are full of abandoned ideas, unfinished stories that didn't work out, because I didn't really care, didn't know enough about the background, or the characters, or what I wanted to say.

Have you ever had a story published, and afterwards wished you could go back and have another crack at it?

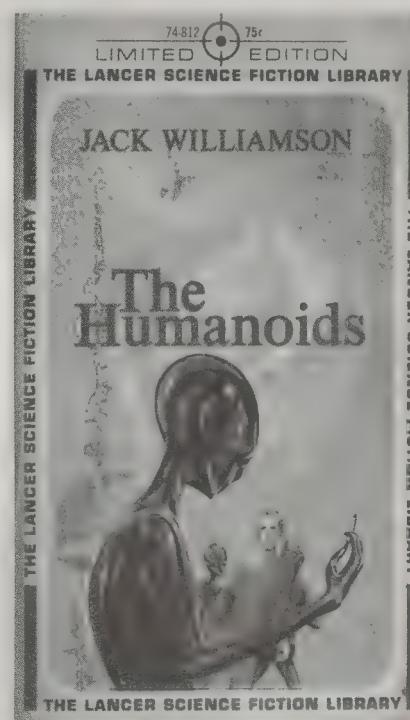
I've had stories published that really shouldn't have been published, certainly. Back in those hard times, I wanted to write for the horror magazines, which were new and paying good rates. I wrote "The Mark of the Monster," which was too heavily influenced by H. P. Lovecraft. It was rejected by the horror magazines. I sent it to *Weird Tales*. They accepted it and published it with a cover picture. The readers panned it heavily. I wish that it had never seen the light of day.

What's a typical day for you?

In these latter days, I don't have a great deal of strength. If my blood pressure's low, I'll have a nap after breakfast. I'll work for an hour or so, check the mail, work until lunch time, have a nap, and work for a while in the afternoon. Then maybe I'll take a walk and have another spell of work if I'm able, but it only comes to three or four hours a day of actual working. But I solve story problems while I'm away from the machines. When the story's really working, you can be living it 24 hours a day almost.

What are your interests outside of writing?

Astronomy more than anything else. I've always tried to keep up with theory and space exploration. I got to attend the reports from Voyager at NASA, which was a fascinating exercise. I learned about the Oort Cloud and wrote a couple of novels set there. My wife and I used to travel every summer while I was teaching.



Where are some places you've travelled to?

I've been to all the continents, if I can include a flight over the Antarctic Circle from Argentina. The most exciting places I've visited are China and Russia. I've been to each one of them three times. The cultures, the museums, the history, the people are exciting to see. It was almost a science-fictional exploration of a different culture. I've seen a lot of Europe and Egypt, the Near East. I've been to India. I'd like to travel more, but the years are catching up with me.

If you hadn't been a writer, what would you have been?

I thought I wanted to be a scientist when I started college. I majored in chemistry and took a couple of years of physics and math. I was offered a student assistantship in chemistry. So if I'd stayed, I might have been a chemist. But by then I was paying for my college experience with my writing. I'd have had to find some other way of financing my education. I'd grown up on a farm and ranch, and the one thing I was sure of was that I didn't want to be a rancher or a farmer.

What kind of ranch was it?

It was a very small operation. My dad homesteaded in Eastern New Mexico in 1916 after the good land had been claimed. We were living below the poverty line, struggling for survival. I'm glad I didn't become a farmer or rancher.

New Mexico doesn't have the best range land, especially up in the high desert. It must've made for some hard times.

Some years it didn't rain. The soil we were trying to farm was sandy. Sand storms would blow the sand enough to cover up a young crop. Farm prices

were low. In 1918, when I was 10 years old, it didn't rain. My dad had a few cattle, and we drove them around eastern New Mexico and into Texas looking for grass for them. I went along and drove the chuck wagon. I remember at the end of summer we shipped them to Kansas City. My dad went along and I remember

waving him goodbye and wondering if I would ever see him again.

He sold the cattle and sent the money back to the bank. He worked in the harvest to make money for railway fare to Arizona.

He worked there in a copper mine to make money to keep the family alive. That was how we survived.

I imagine the high-tech farming and ranching operations of today are beyond even most science-fiction speculations of that time.

Yes, agriculture has become a high-tech activity itself. My brother's still at it. Our original homestead is now part of a larger ranch. He's an expert on genetics and animal feeding, artificial insemination and ranch management.

What do you hope to be remembered

for 100 years from now?

I'm not sure I'll be remembered at all. I pioneered some of the science-fictional themes such as antimatter. I invented the term "terraforming," which seems to have gotten into the language – at least into the dictionary. I was the first person to use the term "genetic engineering" so far as Webster's Collegiate Dictionary knows. I sent them tear sheets from *Dragon's Island*, and they agreed to date the first use back to '51. Of course, in 100 years I don't know what will be remembered.

I hadn't realized you were responsible for terraforming. Everyone's obviously looking at Mars as a candidate. Do you think that's ever going to become a reality?

Well, I've written a Mars novel, *Beachhead*, but when you consider all the parts of the Earth that might be terraformed, it seems like a long haul to Mars. A lot of New Mexico could stand some weather modification. We human beings are part of a very complicated biological system that we don't entirely understand. I'm not sure how successfully all of it can be translated to other environments, so I'm not as enthusiastic about terraforming as I was in 1942.

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Ian R MacLeod
fiction

David Langford

<http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/iplus>

critique

Jonathan Wylie

Stephen Baxter

Ian McDonald

Keith Brooke

Molly Brown

insight

infinity plus

Nicholas Royle

Eric Brown

Millions of fans rushed me the *Variety* report about a coming US TV movie called *Reaper* which innovatively centres on "a computer virus that produces images that can kill anyone who sees them." Now A. E. van Vogt made a fair few bob from *Alien*'s pillaging of his "Discord in Scarlet", and I'm wondering whether anyone remembers my own stories "Blit" (*Interzone 25*, 1988) and "What Happened at Cambridge IV" (*Digital Dreams*, 1990)...

THE BURROWERS BENEATH

Richard Bleiler passes on a tale of editorial terror. "My all-time horrible copyeditor story involves Gale: I did the piece on Thomas Burke for the recently issued *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 197. One of my original lines involved a story in which a girl's father rents her bed to indigent seamen. The copyeditor changed bed to body..."

Ted Hughes (1930-1998), Poet Laureate since 1984, died of cancer on 29 October; a great deal of his verse was fantastic, and his children's fantasy *The Iron Man* (1968) is widely loved.

Sam J. Lundwall, Sweden's Mr Science Fiction, was reported in the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* as having published his last book. "I woke up one day and realized I couldn't publish books any more. The losses have been too big." Lundwall-watchers point out that the same paper has quoted him as "quitting publishing forever" on several past occasions, each time followed by a relapse...

Roddy McDowall (1928-1998), the one-time child movie star best known to sf fans for adult appearances in *Planet of the Apes* (1968) and its sequels, died of cancer on 3 October. He was 70.

Ian Watson foresees Doom: "For the final day of their Millennium Con the Israelis have hired none other than Armageddon, namely the museum at Megiddo (which otherwise is just a lot of baked earth). A fleet of cars will head there climactically from Tel Aviv. Truly inspired."

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

World Fantasy Awards. John Clute and John Grant danced a jig at the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*'s "Professional" category win. Also... Novel: Jeffrey Ford, *The Physiognomy*. Novella: Richard Bowes, "Streetcar Dreams." Short: P. D. Cacek, "Dust Motes." Anthology: *Bending The Landscape* ed Nicola Griffith & Stephen Pagel. Collection: Brian McNaughton, *The Throne of Bones*. Artist: Alan Lee. Non-professional: Fedogan & Bremer. Life Achievement: Edward L. Ferman, Andre Norton.

Publishers & Sinners. Virgin Publishing launch a new sf/fantasy imprint, Virgin Worlds, in March 1999. The

ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

stated policy is to publish new or little-known writers rather than "big-name authors and bought-in American tomes"; the three initial novels are by Trevor Hoyle and two unknowns.

Extrapolating from a recent experience with Virgin Trains, I assume these books will appear late, move at a snail's pace, and completely miss the connection with any follow-up volume.

Knives Out in Australia. *The MUP Encyclopaedia of Australian SF and Fantasy* (ed Paul Collins, associate eds Sean McMullen & Steven Paulsen; MUP is Melbourne University Press) was not universally welcomed, despite fine bibliographies. While numerous minor writers get kindly and even gushy entries, laden with cosy trivia apparently lifted from author questionnaires, multiple award-winner Terry Dowling is singled out by Collins for dismissive sneers ("obscure... impenetrable... obtuse") found nowhere else in the book. Critics are unhappy: Damien Broderick calls this "regrettable," Peter Nicholls prefers "disgraceful," and to John Clute's finely tuned nostrils the treatment of Dowling "stank." It is said that the associate editors themselves objected strongly, with McMullen returning his editorial fee and asking that his name be removed from future editions.

Oh Dear. Marvel Comics recalled over 250,000 copies of their *Wolverine* comic book when a passing remark about an adversary – "the killer known as Sabretooth" – turned out to have been lettered as "the kike known as Sabretooth." Just to make things worse, the offending issue was scheduled for sale on Yom Kippur... Although it seems that no copies were actually sold, Marvel have grovelled extensively.

Ici On Parle Raman. The "untranslated literature" section at Borders bookshop, Oxford Street, contains a treat for

sf fan linguists. They sell Anne Rice and Arthur C. Clarke in the original French.

To Boldly Sue... Paramount were unhappy about Sam Ramer's *The Joy of Trek*, and succeeded in having it banned "pending the outcome of a full-blown copyright infringement trial in which the studio will seek over \$22 million in damages." The judge opined that Ramer's use of plot summaries and exposition of *Star Trek* background (which "fictitious history is a story, created and owned by Paramount") went far beyond fair use. An appeal is in progress. Paramount's lawyers cocked things up by telling bookshops that sales of existing stock – allowed under the injunction – would be in contempt of court... thus providing Ramer's company Carol Publishing with grounds for a countersuit.

Futureshock, the Glasgow sf/comics shop, found an interesting route to outraged local publicity: swastikas and pro-Serbian sentiments in the window, supported by owner Neil Craig's tasteful soundbites like "Bosnian Muslims were famous for staging massacres of their own people and blaming the Serbs."

Small Press. For inscrutable reasons Bernard Pearson sends me his artistic creation "The Millennium Bug," an enjoyably disgusting beastie some 3" high which is busily rending and devouring a computer. Gorblimey. Enquiries to Windy Ridge Studio, Woolpit, Suffolk, IP30 9SH.

Way of the World. Clue spotted in a recent *Daily Telegraph* General Knowledge Crossword: "What Romulan and Klingon ships do to be rendered invisible (5)." As our appalled correspondent spluttered, "In the *Telegraph*! What is the world coming to?"

Thog's Masterclass. *Dept of True Romance in Author's Acknowledgements:* "And two very special people, Richard and Kahlan, for choosing me to tell their story. Their tears and triumphs have touched my heart. I will never be the same again." (Terry Goodkind, *Wizard's First Rule*, 1994)... "Her blond cheeks gradually turned to a darker color as the day – unlike other days, which were often as slow as forever – devoured itself, digesting hours in great gulps." (A. E. van Vogt, "Humans, Go Home!", 1969)... *Dept of Short Attention Spans:* p10.

"Pick... was a six-inch-high sylvan, a forest creature... with body and limbs of twigs and hair and beard of moss." p28. "A second look suggested [Pick] was a poorly designed child's doll made out of tree parts. He was a sylvan, in fact, six inches high..." (Terry Brooks, *A Knight of the Word*, 1998)... *Dept of Detached Private Parts:* "Some detached part of him heard the click of two sets of teeth meeting after they cleaved through skin, meat, veins and urethra." (Simon Clark, *Vampyric*, 1998)

HOST

Darrell Schweitzer

You can never get *used* to this town, Henry," I said. "Even after five years, the weirdness is still in my face, daily."

"So nu? It's Tinseltown, Hollywood USA, kiddo. You were expecting maybe Little Rock, Arkansas?"

"I don't know what I was expecting —"

"You're the one who lives here. I'm from New York, remember?"

That was only one of the infinite number of things which, subtly, didn't make any sense at all. Henry Jessel was from the one city in the country where most people don't have cars, even feel the need for them, and he was driving the rented car he'd insisting on getting at the airport to pick *me* up at my place. Here we were on the Harbor Freeway, amid some of the worst driving conditions in the world, where you can theoretically get from anywhere to anywhere in 45 minutes but in practice sometime between half an hour and next week. *He* was the one who wanted to be independent, or absorb the L.A. experience or something. He was driving. I think he did it to impress upon me that he was in *control*.

"Yo! Look out!"

He swerved. The lunatic who had never head of turn signals and probably thought solid matter could pass through solid matter if you only wish upon a star

cleared our fender by inches.

"Tinseltown, kiddo," Henry said again, remembering to breathe.

Henry Jessel was nine years my junior, but he'd always somehow been the leader in our friendship or partnership or whatever it was. He had all but seized control of my life, which entitled him to take 15 percent of my income and call me "kiddo." Henry Jessel was my literary agent. He got me my first novelization job, *Captain Cut-throat*, the book version of a pirate movie which had lasted in the theatres almost a whole day; a book which sold *dozens* of copies. Then he loaded me on a plane for the Coast, where I, Jerry Jack Miller, became one of the least-known, best-paid writers in Hollywood, or anywhere else for that matter.

And I didn't even work in movies. Not exactly. Which was the problem. I was a ghost. My specialty was writing novels for TV stars who pretended to be novelists, which paid extraordinarily well, but my name seldom made it even into the dedication. I felt like I was pouring my talents down a black hole.

"I just can't *do* it any more," I said. "I stare at the blank screen and I *can't*."

"You *are* behind on your next book," Henry said, gravely. As we absorbed the quintessential Los Angeles expe-

rience, sitting gridlocked in traffic in the dry-roasting August heat while the car's air-conditioner strained desperately to cope, it all came out, how I'd loved it all at first, and done all the touristy things in the first few weeks out here: Disneyland, Universal, Hollywood Boulevard and the Walk of Fame – and that was where the disillusion began to set in, because Hollywood Boulevard is a wreck, with many of the great Deco theatres just burned-out shells between blocks of shabby storefronts and outlets for we-want-your-bucks religious cults; and there's even a crack in Elvis's star, right there in the sidewalk and nobody really cares except maybe the enormous dinosaur looking down over; but for a while still I found the smaller weird things, the fun things, which kept me going for a while, like the Ackermansion and the Museum of Jurassic Technology and Frankenstein's Restaurant (where the tables are haunted); and Venice Beach is really very nice, and I even made the pilgrimage to Bronson Canyon where they filmed any number of matinee westerns, not to mention *Robot Monster*; but I suppose it was when I saw *Donald Fucking Duck*'s footprints in the cement in front of Grauman's Chinese, right next to Shirley Temple's and Humphrey Bogart's that it came to me, *Hey, this whole goddamn town is a lie, which makes me the lie behind the lie – and – and –*

Henry reached over and put his hand on my shoulder in a fatherly way and said, "You don't have to live in Hollywood, not at this stage of your career. Later, yes, but for now you could write your books just as well from a trailer park in Nebraska, and if you'd like me to arrange it –"

"That's not the point, Henry."

"No it isn't. You aren't getting to the point. Jerry, when you talk to me, I will listen. But when you just *kvetch*, I will let it wash over me like water over a stone until you get to the point. And, incidentally, Donald Duck doesn't have a middle name, so watch it."

Traffic started moving again. In time we squeezed by the scene of a multiple-car accident, where it didn't look like anyone was hurt but there were cops everywhere and people waving their arms and shouting; only we couldn't hear what they were saying because the windows were up and the air conditioning was on (which made it all unreal, like a movie with the soundtrack turned off), and that was when I got to the point we'd both been waiting for.

"I'm *nothing*, Henry, nobody. I'm not a *writer*. I'm the guy who does space-operas for Carl Sanderson to put his name on. The man is an absolute *fake*. He's a Schwarzenegger ripoff and even his muscles are fake. He's supposed to be this square-jawed hero, but I happen to know that his jaw's a fake too. It's prosthetic. He got it from the same company that does Jack Palance's cheekbones and Kirk Douglas's chin. Christ, the way that moron gets on the talk shows you'd think he actually thinks he wrote those books, or can even read them."

"The man is an *actor*, Jerry. That's his job. He's been a cowboy, a gladiator, the robot on *Cybercops*, and now he's the mercenary captain on *Galactic Avengers*. He's fully capable of playing the role of a writer if the powers

that be back in New York want to shell out hundreds of thousands of bucks for books with his name on them, and if he doesn't actually know how to spell 'the' the same way twice in a row, that is a small and incidental detail which you and I are paid very well to take care of."

"I'm just a hack, Henry. I want to be something more, something real."

Since we were caught motionless in traffic again, Henry was able to turn to me with a look of genuine alarm on his face and say, "Jerry, you're not having an attack of artistic integrity, are you?"

"Well, I –"

"Jerry, remember what you were before I made you what you are. You'd published a few pretty sonnets in quarterlies which paid you in copies, and then there were your short stories for which the publishers sometimes threw in a packet of bird-seed; and then I said to you, 'Put yourself in my hands,' and you put yourself there, and now you live in a gorgeous house in Palos Verdes and you got a gorgeous wife and gorgeous kids, and your bank account is not at all below six figures. I'd say you're doing pretty well, Jerry, but remember, it's part of a bargain you and I made five years ago, and I got plans for you in the future too, but for it all to work, you've got to do your part while I do my part. I am sure you understand that, Jerry. I do not phrase that as a question. I made you an offer and you accepted, of your own free will, knowing what it would entail."

"Ah, Mephistopheles –"

Once more he touched me on the shoulder in that father-knows-best sort of way and said, "I will take care of everything, Jerry. I'm your agent. Trust me."

And again the traffic started moving, pretty briskly this time, and all I said now was, "Where are we going anyway?"

"You haven't figured out?"

"Henry, this is Los Angeles, which is like Manhattan only horizontal. It's so big you can see the curvature of the Earth in some of the parking lots. No, I don't know where we're going or what it is exactly we're trying to accomplish."

"Think of it as emergency therapy, Jerry. Something to get the creative juices flowing."

"A sanatorium then, for shock treatment?"

"More of a secret, something which, as they'd say in the military, is available on a need-to-know basis. Now you need to know, so that's where we're going."

"Ah, I see."

"No you don't."

"So you're psychic now, too?"

"No need, Jerry. But as your literary agent, I do have certain talents."

"You and Carl Sanderson both."

"Exactly."

There was an ominous resonance to that last line, but I didn't say anything more and just stared out the window as we got off the Freeway a little past Burbank and turned and turned again and again; and if Henry knew where he was going then maybe he really did have special powers. Maybe I even dozed off for a while because as the sun went down I looked at my reflection in the

windshield and for a long moment of helpless, utter horror, I saw not my own face, but that of Carl Sanderson, heroic space mercenary of large screen and small; then I was clawing away at my face and it came off and underneath was a robot and cowboy and a gladiator and Kermit the Frog and a bug-eyed, drooling Smile Face and then just a skull, which cracked into dust and bits, and there I was sitting in the car next to Henry with no head at all, and he reached over and screwed a giant lightbulb into my neck; which he switched on somehow, and put a paper mask on top of it, which started to burn through from the heat of the bulb –

And then the car came gently to a stop and Henry nudged me.

“Hey, kiddo.”

I put my hands to my face to make sure I was really me. “We’re here,” he said.

Here was somewhere north of the Hollywood Hills, where the desert almost starts, in a non-committal way. We walked across a parking lot just a little bit too small to have its own moon to a completely nondescript bungalow which had a little brass sign by the door that read SIMULACRUM STUDIOS INC., which told me nothing at all, but told Henry enough that he got out an ID card of some sort, slid it into a lock, and the door buzzed open.

“I hope we’re not late,” I said. “The traffic.”

“They know about that.”

After a minute or two, I didn’t doubt that “they” knew about everything, because we’d just walked into what could have been the set for a spy movie. Henry used the ID card again, and again. Doors buzzed open. Panels slid back. Guys in uniforms made phonecalls in hushed tones. We had to place our hands on scanners. The next thing, I was sure, was that we’d be crowded into a phone-booth and there’d be *no question* that Henry knew what the secret number was, and then the floor would drop out... but no, it was just endless escalators, like the ones at Universal Studios where by the time you’re halfway down you realize you’ve left your stomach behind in the stratosphere and there’s a dinosaur waiting to eat you up at the bottom in the *Jurassic Park* ride... but I digress, and down we went, and down, and down, until we came to yet another series of vast, sealed off, secret rooms where scientists in lab coats passed silently this way and that and there wasn’t a crackling Jacob’s Ladder or cackling hunchbacked assistant in sight.

At last a very polite lady who could well have been the Chief Assistant Sub-Deputy Aide at the CIA ushered us into a little circular theatre of some kind and closed the door behind us.

I thought I heard air hiss, as if we’d been sealed into a space capsule.

The lights dimmed.

“Henry, what is this?”

“Be quiet. It’s what you’ve got to see.”

A panel slid back in the ceiling. Apparatus lowered.

And for a moment after that I thought we were going to die, or at least be blinded by the searing flash, because the thing coming out of the ceiling was a dead ringer for the gigantic laser that almost took Sean Con-

nery’s balls off in *Goldfinger* – but the beam was gentle. It just touched the floor in front of us and then other beams shot out from the walls on either side, and in front of us, and right over our heads, and all these beams of light mixed and *whirled* somehow, like paint you drop onto one of those little gizmos that spins the paper; only the result wasn’t just sunburst splotches and streaks. Not after a second or two anyway. A shape began to form in the middle of the air. It spread out, and split, until it had what we distinctly saw as two *legs*, which lowered themselves down to the floor. The lights changed colour now, and texture, if light can be said to have texture. From the apparatus came a high-pitched whining and the smell of ozone. The light *rippled*, like a reflection on a pool in sunlight, and the thing before us was definitely human-shaped now, a man, yes; I could make out the face, a little, a bit more.

Then the machinery stopped, the lights came back up, and *there he was*, standing in front of us, as real as could be, if such words have any meaning any more.

My agent got up and went over to the man in the *Galactic Avengers* uniform who stood in the middle of the circular floor. Then he turned back to me.

“Jerry Jack Miller, I’d like you to meet Carl Sanderson.”

I didn’t know what to say or do. I just gaped.

He, *it*, Sanderson or the thing which looked like Sanderson, square jaw and all, flashed me his famous smile, twinkled his blue eyes, and said, “Don’t bother to get up.”

He held out his hand, and I reached for it, but he missed and his hand passed *right through* my forearm. Sparks flew. I felt a shock and gave out a yell and drew back.

Sanderson *rippled*, his whole body shifting side to side real fast, and his head seemed to jerk in a way no living human being’s head could ever move, and he said, “Pl – please – pleased to –”

“Sometimes it takes them a moment to get the calibrations exactly right,” Henry whispered. “Don’t worry. Everything’s fine.”

Henry flashed me *his* famous smile, which is closer to what a rat sees when confronted by a hungry cobra who says to him, *Let’s make a deal*; but he was my agent and I remembered that he was on my side.

Then Sanderson shook my hand, and his touch was warm and firm, and he said, “Always pleased to meet one of my fans.”

The CIA lady came in and said, “Would you excuse us? Mister Sanderson has to meet the press before tonight’s appearance.”

The two of them went out and it was Sanderson who very solidly opened and closed the door for the lady, being a far more impeccable gentleman in “life” than he was on TV.

I stared at Henry.

“So, what was *that*? Is this the big secret, that Sanderson’s even more of a fake, that they’ve got holograms to take his place for his public appearances – ?”

“It’s not a hologram, exactly. It’s a multiple-task, self-programming, holographic AI.”

"AI?"

"Artificial Intelligence. It's generated as you have seen. If they put enough power into it, it can retain its integrity for weeks at a time. A single zap and a Virtual Cast Member can last through an entire film shoot."

"But this is ridiculous. No, it's *obscene*. What does the *real* Carl Sanderson do, just hang around in his palace, get laid, and collect his checks?"

"That *was* the real Carl Sanderson, Jerry. He does everything an actor is expected to do, only better. He never forgets his lines."

"I'll bet."

"That would be a very safe bet, Jerry. He is totally reliable."

"But the original, *human*, flesh-and-blood Sanderson -?"

"You don't get it, Jerry, do you, unless I have to spell it out. There *is* no such person as Carl Sanderson, not any more. There *is* only the simulacrum. The guy who started out as a TV cowboy in the '60s, well, his career didn't go forward. Only a few of his, you might say, talents, have continued -"

"But that's awful -"

"So as you see, his famous square jaw is not a prosthetic. *He* is a prosthetic."

"Oh, shit... What does it *mean*?"

"What it means, Jerry, is that *you* are the author of all those books you write. You and nobody else. Even AI programs aren't smart enough to write novels yet. So doesn't that cheer you up? Isn't everything all right now, kiddo?"

I was almost in tears then.

"No," I said. "No, it isn't."

"Jerry," he said sternly. "You knew what you were getting into when you became my client. Grow up, kiddo. If you can't take the heat, get out of the damn swimming pool."

"Metaphors were never your strong point, were they Henry?"

"I got plenty of strong points. But you, kiddo, need a good talking to."

So I got a good talking to, later, at Frankenstein's Haunted Restaurant (now a chain, under new management) where one of the trick tables nearby tipped over suddenly while the waiter was taking an order, and everybody tittered nervously. I looked up. When I looked down again a hand rose up out of our table top and put an eyeball in my drink, which lit up like a Christmas ornament and winked.

When I looked up from that, Boris Karloff as *The Bodysnatcher* was sitting across from me, and explaining in that sinister, lisping voice of his, "We're all dust in the end, Jerry, or random electrons. What does it matter? It's what you do in the meantime that counts."

Then something crashed somewhere and when I looked again, it was a completely wasted F. Scott Fitzgerald, with dark bags under his eyes, saying, "They ruined me, but they don't have to ruin you, if only you'll just play the game -"

Then it was Orson Welles leaning over, whispering into my face, telling me what it was all about.

I also had a talk with Hemingway who said, "When they made *For Whom the Cash Register Tolls*, I thought it was crap, but the cash register kept on tolling no matter what."

Humphrey Bogart and Fred Astaire both explained that the TV commercials they're doing these days are just warmup exercises, and both planned full comebacks.

"I might want to write a book with you one day, kid," Bogart said.

Every time the cast changed, the eyeball blinked. It was a projector of some kind.

I even met Donald Duck, whose flippers still had cement on them. He assured me he had no middle name. He was looking for somebody to collaborate with him on his autobiography. The money involved would have been enough to jumpstart the economy of a Third World nation.

"I couldn't do it without *you*," said the duck.

Henry leaned over the table, into the light of the glowing eyeball in my drink.

"That's the beauty of it, Jerry. Maybe some *actors* have something to worry about these days, but *you're* sitting pretty."

I faked a smile. "Because there are no holo-whosit-AI writers, is that it?"

"Yes. Precisely. That's it. Actors, directors, producers, yes, but *you're* better off than all them. So start counting your blessings, kiddo."

"I feel like slitting my throat. Do you think there'll be any virtual blood?"

That was when he hauled me out of there by the collar and *threw* me back into the car.

"Not on *my* 15 percent, you don't!"

So we drove back to Hollywood Boulevard, and on the way it was Henry Jessel who worked his magic on me, not any AI of William Shakespeare or Edward D. Wood or whoever, just my old pal, whom I'd known since he was still in high school and we were both trying to break into paperback science fiction, as if that were the way to make oneself part of the stellar firmament. Just Henry, who did what he does best, and so the ending of my story is a trifle mysterious, a trifle vague, because even I don't know precisely how he did it, but he is my *agent*, and agents have mysterious powers, and I guess he just put the whammy on me.

What he did was come up with a really good metaphor for once. It could have been a Zen riddle.

He said, "If everyone is wearing masks all the time, how do you know it's really them?"

Precisely. There might even be Virtual Publishers in New York, but they weren't on the same wavelength as the folks in Hollywood, and in fact only agents like Henry could connect the two. Only he knew the secrets of both. Only he could have shown me what he had shown me.

"Your *editor* is a big Carl Sanderson fan," he said. "She's dying to meet him. Maybe someday soon we can all get together."

That is, if my editor thinks that Carl Sanderson is a

A VICTORIAN GHOST STORY

Kim Newman

Among the blessings of civilization," began Ernest Virtue, his shrewd glance passing over us, one by one, "can any be more profound and yet simple than oak panelling? Its humble stoutness, derived from the most English of trees, serves us as our forefathers were served by the blockstones of their castles. Observe the play of firelight upon the grain. Does it not seem like armour? In a room lined with oak panels, one is safe, shielded from all harm, insusceptible to all fear. If not for oak panelling, I would not have the fortitude to tell you this story.

"Wondrous indeed is it to plump oneself in a comfortably-stuffed leather armchair in the heart of a metropolis and find oneself at peace, the raucous sounds of the outside world muffled, the pestilential fogs of the capital banished. Add to the picture a roaring fire providing both light and warmth, the after-effects of a hearty meal, generous measures of fine old brandy and healthy infusions of pungent cigar smoke, and one might think oneself transported from the cares of the quotidian world to a higher realm even than that ruled over by our own dear Queen, God rest the soul of her beloved Prince Consort Albert. Without such an Elysian refuge, a man might be maddened by London. For this city is the most haunted place on Earth."

In the club-room, the topic of the evening had turned to the beyond, and we were telling ghost stories. Colonel Beauregard had conjured the hill-spirits of far-off India, detailing the unhappy fate of a degenerate officer who meddled with the native women and incurred the wrath of a little brown priest. The Reverend Mr Weeks had countered with a story of phantoms in a ruined abbey on an abandoned isle in the Hebrides, and of an unwary delver after treasure driven out of his wits by an intelligence that seemed composed of creeping, writhing kelp.

We were pleasantly stirred from the torpor that follows a substantial meal, awakened by brandy and terror, thirsty perhaps for more of both.

I had not expected Virtue – Mr Ernest Meiklejohn Virtue, of the brokerage firm of Banning,

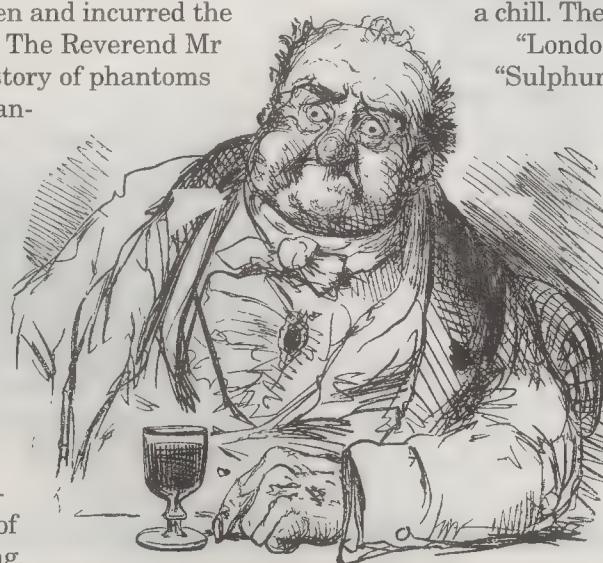
Clinch and Virtue – to enter into the field and contribute a story. I had written him up for the illustrated press some months earlier and had formed the opinion that he was a man entirely of this world. Somewhat past middle age, with a barrel of a body and a generosity of grey whiskers about his chops to compensate for a growing expanse of baldness upon his dome, he was a man of substance. If not for the quality of his clothes, he might pass as an ageing prize-fighter or the chucker-out in a rowdy hostelry. It was said that many who confronted him on the floor of the Exchange yielded for fear that he would extend his financial attacks into the arena of physical assault. Needless to say, away from the bear-pit of the stock market, he had a reputation as the most charitable and mild-mannered of souls.

"I have in these last months become victim to a particularly pernicious species of apparition," Virtue continued. "Gentlemen, you see before you a man persecuted beyond endurance, persecuted by spectres."

I drew in breath. From his solemn countenance, I could tell Virtue was not joshing us. The Colonel and the Reverend had passed on tales given them by colleagues who were themselves not the primary parties in the events recounted. Both had endeavoured, in the spirit of the thing as it were, to embroider, to add their own details, increasing the horripilating effects of their anecdotes. In comparison, Virtue seemed to offer the uncut, unpolished stone of experience.

Even in the warmth of the club-room, I felt a chill. The brandy I sipped stung my mouth.

"London is full of fog," Virtue continued. "Sulphurous, clinging, lingering, choking fog. As you know, it makes the streets seem like river-beds and turns us all into bottom-crawlers, probing blindly, advancing step by step. A moment's lapse of concentration and one is lost. All this is familiar to you. But I tell you there are creatures in the fog, unperceived by all but a few. These entities harbour a singular hostility, a resentment almost, for those of us who enjoy the comforts of the living."



The Reverend Weeks nodded sagely. Colonel Beau-regard's hand went to his thigh, where, were he in uniform, his pistol would have been.

"I first became aware of these infernal spirits some months ago. I was, I confess, particularly pleased with myself that day. I'd concluded a nice piece of business, manipulating the market in an especially cunning manner so that my own cause was victorious and my rivals routed. I need not trouble you with details, but Weeks – who profited not a little from being let in on my machinations – can testify to the neatness of the trick. It would not be overstating the situation to say that fortunes changed hands that afternoon. *The Times* noted, somewhat predictably, 'Virtue is Triumphant.'

"While I indulged in a celebratory tot with my allies, accepting in all good grace the muttered tributes of fallen foes, the first real fog of autumn gathered in the streets. It rose like a tide of soup around scurrying pedestrians, washing against the thighs of the cabmen perched on their seats, closing over the backs of their horses. It is my custom to walk from the Exchange to my house in Red Lion Square, abjuring the comfort of a hansom for the sake of exercise. It is important to maintain the body, for flesh is the cloak of the soul and clothes should always make a statement, testifying to the man who wears them. I set out, flushed with my success..."

"...and with good spirits, I'll be bound," said Beau-regard.

Virtue inclined his head. "A dram of whisky, no more. I have, of course, considered that my experience might have been shaped by an intoxication unperceived by myself. Indeed, this is what I later tried desperately to tell myself. However, that came afterwards.

"I am familiar with my route home. I was often given to expressing the sentiment that I daresay I could find my way to my front door blindfold. This sudden fog, which you might remember being of remarkable consistency, put my rash boast to the test.

"I must have made a misturn, for I walked for some considerable time, far longer than it should have taken me to return myself safely to my own doorstep. The outlines of the buildings that I perceived through the yellow wafting curtain of the fog did not resolve themselves into the familiar contours of Red Lion Square. I was going over and over in my mind the triumph of the day, allowing myself something of the sin of pride in appreciating my own cleverness. Strategic minor purchases like the opening feints of a fencing match diverted those who opposed my interests until I was ready to deliver the elegant killing thrusts that secured my victory. I saw columns of figures piled up like heavenly bricks, and neglected to pay attention to the earthly stones beneath my feet.

"At length, I brought myself up short and looked around.

"It is a very queer sensation indeed to find oneself utterly alone in the middle of London. The fog hung so thickly as to be impenetrable, seeming almost to have coalesced about my person. If I reached out, my hand grew indistinct and then disappeared entirely from my

sight. The effects of the fog were by no means restricted to the obscuring of my sense of sight. It was of that singular texture, that dampness and stickiness, that clings to one's clothes and can sometimes never be washed away, that gums up your eyes and makes your nostrils flow, that tickles the throat, that seems to invade your anatomy and clog your chest and heart. That taste we Londoners can never entirely be free of was strong in my mouth, to the point of vileness. It was as if the fog had targeted me of all the millions of the city, and wrapped me in its woolly, stinking shroud, isolating me from my fellows, holding me fast in one spot.

"I would have continued to walk, but in my unlovely gloating I had lost all sense of direction. The sun was setting, and the yellow of the fog turning to a darker hue, tendrils of brown and black winding through it. But this change of light was general, not from a specific direction that would have enabled me at least to fix a compass point. Dread fingertips touched my heart, coldly caressing. Terror sparked in my brain. It was my impulse to move, to run from the spot, to career blindly into the opaque cloud that clung to the streets, to keep running until I was free of this gathering gloom. Yet I was still Ernest Meiklejohn Virtue, Lion of the City, Master of the Exchange. I have iron in my soul. I resisted the impulse to panic, recognizing it from many a hairy moment on the market floor, knowing that if I held fast I would prevail.

"I felt them, first.

"Something brushed past me, about the size of a big dog but clad in damp ragged cloth not sleek smooth fur. Something that went on two shod feet, yet was not what I would consider a child. Something that was all bones and hurry. I was molested slightly, poked and prodded, and had good cause to clamp a protective fist about my gold watch. Then the creature was gone. All I saw of it was a mop-head of twiggy hair, like a flying bird's nest, at about waist-height, zooming away into the fog. I heard footfalls clatter, and then it was gone.

"What had it been?

"There were others. I was at an intersection, it seems, and these creatures passed every which way at will, jostling me one way and another. I glimpsed sparkling eyes, and felt hard little shoulders. I heard their mewlings, which were not the cries of animals and yet bore little resemblance to the patterns of civilized speech. I was possessed, I admit, with a loathing that went deeper than my intellect. An instinctive revulsion that made me shrink inside my clothes with each rude touch. I was sure their touch left deposits upon my person, and that these substances would prove even less susceptible to cleaning away than the miasmal filth of fog. They chattered and stank and jeered and passed by.

"It could only have taken a minute or so. The creatures were soon gone. I found myself breathing hard, sucking into my lungs yet more of the ghastly fog, which made me cough and splutter all the more. I bent double. I was drowning in the city's visible stench."

Virtue took a swig of brandy and sloshed it around his mouth, trying to wash away the remembered taste. He

had become quite agitated in the recounting of his experience, offering none of the eye-rolls and leers with which the Colonel and the Reverend had punctuated their tales. His ghost story was of a different quality. I found myself feeling a little of the horror Virtue claimed to have felt, but tempered by a distance, a quarrelsome need to question. I bit my tongue, and let him continue.

“When I straightened up, a miraculous transformation was taking place, as if in answer to a prayer I had not dared to voice. The fog was thinning, as it sometimes does. Good clean transparent air rushed in from somewhere and diluted the muddy clouds, reducing it to streamers of ropy substance and a ground-covering of thin white mist. A draught hurried the worst of the stuff away, and I could again make out something of the situation in which I found myself.

“Naturally, I felt a surge of joy at my deliverance. But it froze in my breast. The scene disclosed was not that which I had expected.

“Simply put, I was transported. From the London we know to another realm entirely, a Stygian parody of the city, entirely loathsome in its crepuscule.

“I stood on a street washed with filth. More mud than stone, more ordure than mud. Buildings stood all around, walls stooped over to make a tunnel of this thoroughfare. The ill-fit bricks bulged in places, allowing foul water to dribble. There were smashed street-lamps, none lit. Fires burned in the night, within the buildings or in barrels set on the street, but heat and light were swallowed by the darkness and cold of this unnatural place. A nearby sign was splashed with dirt, unreadable. I knew that I was, in a more profound sense than I could imagine, lost.

“This place was inhabited. That is the worst of it.

“The first ghost I got a good look at inspired me not to horror but to pity. It was a waif-like thing, with huge liquid eyes and a tiny knot of a mouth, clad only in a vest-like singlet that disclosed wasted arms and grubby bare feet. I was unsure of its sex, for it wore a shapeless cap of some rough material over its hair, but I knew that it was not alive as we are. This was some poor lost soul, wandering.

“It saw me and stretched out a hand, palm up, beseeching.

“I had much this creature wanted, I was sure, but nothing I could give. Its eyes grew wetter and its head angled to one side. I heard its painful moan, a wordless begging. I stifled the pity that sprang up unwanted in my breast, and was on my guard against this ghostly thing. I fancied malice in its eye. That this creature loved me not, would do me harm if it could, was not to be trusted.

“There were others, roughly in the shapes of men and women, but clad as even the lowest savage of India would never clothe himself, in the meanest of rags. I was assaulted by details. Rotten teeth, marbled eyes, grimy claw-nails, fungus swatches of hair, great scabs, mismatched buttons.

“Had these once been people?

“They came out of their dwellings and gathered around me, like a pack of dangerous dogs.

“You are spirits,’ I declared, ‘and you cannot harm a Christian soul. Begone!’

“My words gave them pause. My mental strength returned. I was better than these creatures. I was alive. They could only touch me if I let them. My moment of weakness was past.

“I still had to escape from this place. And to do so, I would have to turn my back. I believe this is the most courageous thing I have ever done.

“I turned and walked away, loudly reciting the Lord’s Prayer. As I knew they would not, the ghosts did not rush at me from behind. I was too strong for that, and they knew me for their better.

“But I heard barks of laughter, horribly close to human sounds of mirth. As I plunged into a bank of thickening fog, returning I hoped to the world of the living, my cheeks burned with an inexplicable embarrassment. The ghosts mocked me, jeering at my back, possessed by a cruel hilarity that cast me out of their region as surely as my feet carried me away, into the fog again.

“Now, I was running almost, at least walking briskly. I began on the Psalms. After some interval, I collided with a police constable in Farringdon Road and was able from there to make my way home.”

The Reverend Mr Weeks nodded sagely, and Colonel Beauregard scowled in sympathy. I felt as if I had myself been transported beyond the rational world, into Ernest Virtue’s hellish half-city.

“I thought, that night as I prepared for my bed, my horrible experience was at an end. I imagined this moment, when I would retell it to good friends within a room of stout oak and know I was beyond the reach of those ghosts. I slept soundly, untroubled by what had occurred. The world was back as it should be, and my place in it was fixed and secure.

“But that laughter had followed me.

“Three days later, in the street outside the Exchange, I heard that laughter again. I looked about, startled, rudely breaking off a conversation. It was broad daylight, if overcast. A great many brokers stood about in groups, discussing the day’s business. Amid so many frock coats and top hats, it was hard to catch a glimpse of the tattered cloak. But it was there, I was sure. The quality of the laugh was not human. It came from the beyond.

“That was not the only incident. I have been certain, always when outside, when on the street, that I have seen a shadow or heard a cry which could only betoken the presence of one or more of that ghostly crew, escapees from that dreadful place abroad in the city of the living. Have they followed me back? Or have they always been among us, unseen by the many, maddening the few cursed souls who have awoken to their presence?

“I have been touched again. Their hands sometimes grip the skirts of my coat as I pass. Their fingers poke and prod. My watch is lost to them. I don’t know when it was stealthed away, but when I found it was gone, I also found a blue bruise on my belly, where the watch must have pressed.

"They love us not, these ghosts. They envy the life we have. They are needy, with a hunger we cannot understand. They would take everything from us if they could. And if they can not have what we have, they will tear us down and destroy all we hold dear, out of spite. I must be strong, must remain strong. Else the world will spin out of its orbit and be lost in the darkness."

"Now, now, old man," said the Colonel. "Chin up."

"Yes, Colonel. I keep my chin up. I keep my back straight. I keep my heart closed. I can resist."

I expected our clergyman to have something to say, but the Reverend Mr Weeks had nodded sagely off to sleep. In itself, that gave me a chill none of the stories had raised.

"For a while, it was dreadful," Virtue continued. "Even in broadest daylight and in the most respectable thoroughfares, I was aware of them. They slouch among us, clinging to their gutters and alleys, boldly meeting our glances, trying with their guttural noises to harry our minds. London is thick with these monsters. I was woken up to their presence, and wondered what spell had been cast over me so that I should be cursed with the power of seeing those things that should decently remain invisible. They are parodies of life, loathsome and pitiable, despicable and damned. Their corruption is complete, and yet they yearn even as we do, for the light, for the warmth. I know you must find this hard to credit, for had another tried to persuade me of this before my experience in the fog I would have deemed him mad. But these ghosts are among us. All the time."

An excitement, almost a rage, had built up in me as Virtue spoke. I had expected one of the others to cut him off, to rend apart his strange misconception. And yet it fell to me.

"Surely," I began, "your ghosts are nothing supernatural. The place you have described is simply a slum. Sadly, many such are to be found in London. Your ghosts are just the poor, no more."

Virtue's eyes fixed me like the lights of a hostile gunboat.

"The poor!" he exclaimed. "The Poor!?"

There was a terrifying force inside him.

"The unfortunate," I continued. "Beggars and wastrels, no doubt. The human detritus of our city, those who through birth or inclination have found themselves settling on the bottom."

"This is London," Virtue said, with a ferocious certainty. "The most prosperous city in the world. No such creatures exist, not naturally. My dear friend, of this I am sure as eggs is eggs. For me, the curtain has lifted and I have seen a hellish world beyond."

I was horror-struck by something new in Virtue's tone. A spark of pity, for me that I could be so deluded as to believe his phantoms to be people like ourselves.

"Colonel Beauregard, Mr Weeks," I appealed.

Neither worthy – for Mr Weeks was now awake again – joined my position.

"This is a case of spectral persecution," Virtue insisted. "It will be resisted. If you ignore them, I have found, they go away. For I am winning my private war. This last week, they have been fainter presences. I can still see them, but I have to weaken and direct my gaze at a fixed shadow to be sure. I have been successful in willing myself free of persecution. By ignoring the ghosts, I deny them substance. Within days, I shall have banished these apparitions entirely. Oak panels are my armour. My mind is my sword."

Somehow, his conviction swayed me. I came to see his experience as he did himself. I still held in my mind my original assumption, but in my heart I knew I relied too much on my mind.

There were ghosts. This city was spectre-plagued. Mr Ernest Meiklejohn Virtue was haunted.

I added my own story to the collection, to conclude the evening. It was hurried, I confess, a confection of hooded monks and a hook-clawed madman, with lovers united beyond the grave and a villain harried over a cliff by the bloodied floating faces of his victims.

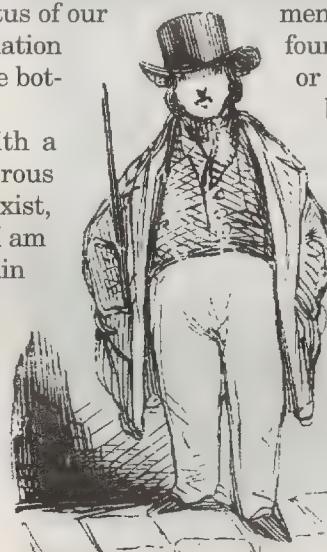
The company broke up, and departed the club to the quarters of the compass.

It was not a foggy night, but it was moonless. I watched Virtue stride off vigorously, down a street ill-lit by faint gaslight. He marched almost, swinging his cane like a lance, looking straight ahead and not into any of the alleys that fed into the street, whistling a hymn that spoke of the rich man in his castle and the poor man at the gate. He made them high and lowly and ordered their estate. In some of the alleys were huddles that breathed and stretched out empty hands. He walked past, unseeing.

For Virtue, the haunting was almost over.

But a horror worse than all the crawling severed hands, floating green shrouds, chattering skulls and ambulant scarecrows pitched in together clung to the stones of this prosperous city, impinging when it had to on the main thoroughfares but festering always in the shadows beyond the gaslight, wrapping the hearts of men and women like you and me in a misery more profound than the sufferings of any wailing spectre bride or seaweed-dripping wrecker's revenant. I remembered Virtue's convictions, of his own rectitude and of the strength of oak panels.

I resolved to model myself on him, and walked home, holding my breath in the darks between the pools of lamplight, arriving safely at my own oak-lined fortress.



Kim Newman's first published short story was "Dreamers" (*Interzone* #8, Summer 1984), since which he has become a famous and much-praised writer, with many novels, collections and non-fiction books to his name. His last appearance here was with "Teddy Bears' Picnic" (in collaboration with Eugene Byrne, issues 122-123).

MUTANT POPCORN



NICK LOWE

All-CG movies may be the first human artform to recapitulate evolutionary history itself, as the limits of renderability work their way up the chain of being. After toy movies, which artfully bypassed the need to showcase any actual organic lifeforms at all, the technology has now advanced to bug-movie level with Pixar's imminent *A Bug's Life* and, first on to dry land, DreamWorks' *Antz*. At this rate another couple of years will see us up to *Fish Tales*, *Molluscs!* and *Amphibianatics*, and slowly we'll work our way through lizard and marsupial movies till we hit the mammalian kingdom around 2006, perhaps – who knows? – even graduating to human beings by the time our kids are too old. For now, the earth belongs to the bugs.

DreamWorks, founded originally by Spielberg and chums to be the creative people's studio, is fast becoming synonymous with "fascinatingly misconceived," and *Antz* is their most exotic folly yet: a full-length animated feature with almost no merchandising possibilities; a happy family movie that quotes from *Pulp Fiction* and includes a face-of-battle scene somewhere between *Starship Troopers* and *Saving Private Ryan*; and an eyepopping new-tech spectacle that uses the most youthful and cutting-edge of all movie genres to tell a socialist fairy tale about young lovers Woody Allen (63) and Sharon Stone (40).

Fairly obviously, *Antz* is to all intents an early-1970s Allen comedy on the pattern of *Bananas*, *Sleeper* and (especially) *Love and Death*, their

standard plot handily summarized by the man himself in *Antz*'s finale: "boy meets girl, boy falls for girl, boy changes social order." It's a craftsman-like pastiche, with two or three lines worthy of the real thing, and mostly pretty disarming. Certainly it's hard for anyone who was alive in the '70s not to feel a twinkle of dewy nostalgia at the great man's voice looping from a character in the flush of romantic youth who hasn't yet lost interest in widescreen adventure and wry political fables. On any other level, though, *Antz* is very strange stuff indeed. Even as a movie about antz, it abounds in weird contradictions. There's some unexpectedly good science about surface tension on the microscale, but oh dear, E. O. Wilson is evidently *liber prohibitus* in the DreamWorks bullpen – which quietly makes its own evolutionary history with a formicid sub-species in which the soldiers are male, the males are flying soldiers, and the workers come in two sexes.

If the excuse here is that primary school science is being sacrificed to higher allegory, it's none too easy to see how it's meant to decode. Indeed, it's precisely in its political consciousness-raising that *Antz*'s contradictions become so ponderable as to approach a kind of zen. The initial state of the colony oscillates curiously between pre- and post-Leninist, a kind of benign feudalism dressed up in socialist rhetoric, with everybody but Woody and Princess Shazza content with their assigned place, and the military mostly loyal to their tsarina. Only misfit Woody dreams of a better world for the workers in which the individual can flourish. ("I gotta believe there's something out there that's better than this," he mopes. "What a bunch of losers – mindless zombies capitulating to an oppressive system!") But history beckons unbeknownst, because the power of an insufficiently-accountable military allows the destabilizing possibility of a coup by Gene Hackman's Pol Pot wannabe, who dreams of literally cleansing the colony out of existence and fathering a new one with the princess: "The past will be washed away and a new day will dawn!" An abortive workers' revolution appropriates classical Marxist slogans against the collectivist ethic and for individual freedoms, and for a while it looks like we might even be in for a socialist religious pic, with prophet Woody leading his flock to the promised land of Insectopia; but in the event he returns from exile to set his people free with the help of a counter-coup from within the officer class, allowing him to marry into the royal family and repopulate the colony with his own progeny.

The moral of this tortuous parable, insofar as it's possible to piece one together, seems to be that sooner or later all classical socialist states turn to dictatorship, purges and genocide, unless they're willing to embrace the principles of devolved social democracy – which differs from totalitarian Stalinism in being *exactly the same*, except that collectivization of labour is now consensual, and everyone has the freedom to organize but simply chooses not to take it up. That may play in Portland, but I'd dearly love to read what the St Petersburg critics make of this one. Woody's own closing lines (apropos his new shrink) are: "He's been helping me to find my place, and you know what? it's right back where I started. But this time I chose it." Like most of what therapists tell you, this is a king-size whopper with a double order of bells on it. In 80 minutes Woody has actually gone from Soil Relocation Engineer to Prince Consort, and transformed his society from a kind of people's despotism to an ideal dictatorship of the proletariat in which everyone knows their place and simply *consents* to the constitutional monarchy into which Woody happens to have married. No wonder the poor boy needs analysis.

The other DreamWorks product of the season is another *Toy Story* spawn, but this time as fervently capitalist as *Antz* is bemusingly Marxist. *Small Soldiers* is the most complex product yet of what may be the defining transformation of popular cinema in the 1990s, the Disneyfication of film economics. The shift of profit from box-office to ever more sophisticated merchandising means that the most successful films – arguably the *only* successful films – are now those which can carry the strongest range of tie-in product lines; so that family fantasy movies, especially, are increasingly financed by, and therefore built to the order of, the toy manufacturers and other franchisees who hold the key to profitability. And *Small Soldiers* may be the first film that genuinely can't be apprehended outside the web of spinoffs in which it's meshed. Effectively DreamWorks' rejoinder to arch-rival Disney, and especially to its benchmark franchising achievement *Toy Story*, *Small Soldiers* is the "creative" studio's satire on corporate creativity-by-marketing, while simultaneously a middling-ambitious attempt to launch a licensing venture of its own. This being DreamWorks, needless to say, there's an awkward flaw at the heart of the concept, which may explain the project's bumpy genesis: the absurd, undeniably iconic plastic commandos

of the title are actually the *baddies*, while the good toys are non-violent, mostly rather weird-looking, and don't get to do much till the finale.

As you might expect from this, the *Small Soldiers* merchandise itself is a remarkable crop, and well worth a wander round the sales. The pleasant surprise is that most of the action figures seem to be mild-mannered Gorgonites (designed, in the movie, to educate, hide and lose) rather than war-psycho Commandoes; I saw a few Major Chip Hazards tucked away round the back, but no sign at all of Nick Nitro, Explosives Expert, or any of the rest of the posse. Instead, the twist is that all the peaceloving Gorgonites, without exception, come packaged for aggressive carpet-top action: "Talking Archer™ with Punching Action!"; "Power Drill Cycle™ with Drilling Battle Assault & Scratch-It™ Figure!"; "Buzzsaw Tank™ with Exclusive Ocular™ Character with Spinning Attack Action (Archer™ figure not included)!" Whether any of this amounts to a bankable Xmas strategy waits to be seen; none of them seemed to be shifting much when I looked. But perhaps the most startling item on the shelves is the "Globotech™ Toy Factory: Mould and Mash your Favourite Small Soldiers™ Characters!" In the movie, Dennis Leary's Globotech is the corporate *villain*, the military multinational that takes over toy company Heartland, downsizes it to two employees, and refocuses it on must-have intelligent war toys built with dodgy peace-dividend surplus chips. ("Globotech," boasts a Verhoeven-esque spoof TV ad: "turning swords into plowshares for you and your family!") As a takeover survivor laments in the prologue, "Heartland has a long tradition of bringing joy to kids. Globotech isn't going to care about that; all they think about is profits."

But then the theme of *Small Soldiers* all along is toy manufacturers' moral right to take your money, and Globotech is simply one side of a phoney opposition that the entire film is set up to mediate. Like *Toy Story*, *Small Soldiers* first moulds, then mashes its own entirely-artificial ethics of toymanship, taking huge pains to reassure us that there is a third way between the largely-bogus conflicts it sets up (here military v civilian capitalism, action toys v educational, old-national v new-global corporate cultures). The model for "tradition"-driven, joybringing Heartland seems to be Hasbro, main player in the *Small Soldiers* concession — which may explain the sadistic gusto with which the products of Hasbro's west-coast nemesis (and Disney partner) Mattel are trashed in the gleeful

*...the theme of
Small Soldiers
all along is toy
manufacturers'
moral right to
take your money*

golflub/Frankenbarbie scene. But since no resemblance is intended to actual corporations et cetera, there's no point in wondering whether Heartland's own bighearted disdain for profit extends to such pesky delinquencies of its real-world counterparts as Indonesian child labour, lobbying against PVC bans, and blind-eyeing abuses of workers' rights in its far-east factories. Instead, the morality of toymaking is constructed entirely in terms of whether your action figurines promote unsuitable ideologies and are likely to firebomb your home.

So perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that, in the end, even Globotech comes out remarkably scathless. In a paradox-laden finale that can be read, depending on how much intelligence one wants to credit to the film's account, as either archly ironic or just interestingly incoherent, *Small Soldiers* unravels most of its own arguments. "Don't call it vio-

lence," says Leary, in the script's most quotable soundbite: "call it *action*. Kids love *action*." Yet in the final reckoning, *action* proves the only winning strategy, and the pacifist Gorgonites have to overcome their loser programming to discover the buzz of asskicking self-assertion by beating the military at their own game — whence the *action* versions now available at all good stores. And in the end, everybody wins, including the dastardly Leary. Everyone but the kids is bought off, and in a deadpan coda of transcendent surrealism the plastic heroes are set free in Yosemite to follow their own quest for toypotia in a Sierra Club pioneer landscape.

This is all so giddy that it's just a pity the film itself isn't a bit more fun. After a long and difficult development, *Small Soldiers* was polished off in something of a hurry, to synchronize with the Byzantine merchandising programme that had been built around the expectation of a film, and legendary mayhem-master and industry loose-Uzi Joe Dante was a comparatively late arrival in the process. The toymen's understandable nervousness about the project may be one reason why the dozen or so writers who'd worried at the still-unfinished script before Dante arrived have left him such a pig's brunch to work with. The human characters, in particular, are a start-to-finish embarrassment, with some truly dire dad-sonning about self-esteem and trust that marks Dante's most dispiriting capitulation yet to the system's bizarre ideology of correct hugging; while anyone actually interested in seeing the hero get off with Kirsten Dunst certainly wouldn't identify with the geeky lead supplied with the package. The plot ideas, gags and momentum seem all to run out in the final act, which largely abandons conventional film narrative to dissolve into a kind of improvised child's play, with armies of rival toys roaring randomly around, making lots of noise and discharging found weaponry. Like all Dante, it keeps Dick Miller in work, resorts freely to pumping soundtrack R'n'R whenever narrative proves too much bother, and is all a bit of a mess, while still being more interesting and enjoyable than a far tidier film could have managed from the same materials; and like the best Dante (which on the whole it's not), it's quite acute on kids' sense of their parents' inadequacies, and has moments of exhilarating dementia where the moviemaking id takes over the forebrain and strips it down to its primitive reptilian core. When the lizards come, we'll be ready.

Nick Lowe



*Antz: Weaver, voiced
by Sylvester Stallone*



Gorillagram

Tony Ballantyne

There was an e-mail from a gorilla waiting in Eric's in-tray.

Dear Eric:

I hope you will forgive me sending you this unsolicited e-mail. My name is Pongo and I am hoping to begin a correspondence with a human being completely unconnected with Dr Jennifer Barnes or any other member of the Camberley Research Institute.

I wish to learn more about human thinking and I believe that you could help me do this. If you are willing to be my pen pal, then I look forward to hearing from you. If not, I apologize for wasting your time.

Yours, Pongo (Gorilla Gorilla Gorilla)

Eric read through the text twice, his lips moving in the pale blue light of the screen. The house was unusually quiet: only the muted sound of the television in the living room downstairs could be heard. Helen had taken Chloe out in the car, hoping that the gentle motion of driving would send her off to sleep. Eric hoped she would remember to bring back something to eat. She had promised to call at the drive-in and pick him up a burger, a peace offering after the row over the burnt lasagne.

Eric was about to dismiss the e-mail as a practical joke

when another landed in his in-tray with a gentle chime.

To: Eric Sims

From: Dr Jennifer Barnes, CRI

cc: Dr Jason Grey, M. Emmanuel Cartes, Dr Ian Flintoft

Dear Mr Sims:

You should have just received a message from one of our research subjects, a female gorilla aged eleven and a half years. Pongo has a vocabulary of around nine hundred words and is capable of intelligible conversations with human beings via a specially adapted computer keyboard.

Pongo is one of our most promising subjects, and has recently expressed a wish to communicate with a "normal member of the public" (my inverted commas). Out of a random sample of 200 people, Pongo chose you. She does not understand what the Internet is, however she does realize that she is speaking to another human being.

I hope you will take this opportunity to speak to Pongo. You are not only being offered the opportunity to take part in a unique experiment but also the chance to gain a new perspective on the world.

Yours, Dr Jennifer Barnes

P.S. Please note: Pongo's input to the computer is being passed through a sentence constructor. This piece of software, developed by my team, forms her "speech" into everyday English. This means that she may appear to be more intelligent, but more importantly, more human than she is. Remember: Pongo is a gorilla. Her view on the world is different to ours. She

will be analyzing you just as you analyze her. Be careful! She has had more practice at this type of analysis than you have. You may not like what she sees!

Eric sat back in his chair, smiling with pride. Imagine, a gorilla had picked him to speak to out of all the people in the world! He wondered what Helen would say when she returned home. He held his fingers over the keyboard wondering what to say. How did you address a gorilla? Hesitantly, he began to type.

Dear Pongo

I would be delighted to be your pen pal. I am flattered that you chose me to write to. I wonder how much you know about me? Let me tell you the basic facts.

I am 31 years old and currently between jobs. I am married to Helen, a teacher, and have an eleven-month-old child called Chloe. What else shall I say? Tonight I spent too long on the computer and left the lasagne to burn. Helen is upset with me because of this.

Eric heard the scraping of the key in the lock downstairs. Helen was back. He called out to her excitedly.

"Helen, come and see this!"

Too late he remembered why Helen had left the house. Chloe made a rattling noise and began to cry. Helen stamped up the stairs to the tiny back bedroom. She stared at him from the doorway, her face pinched from lack of sleep.

"Well done, Eric," she snapped. "I'd only just got her off. You can deal with her now. I'm going to bed."

She handed him the baby and stamped off to their bedroom. Eric held the crying Chloe in one arm as he signed off the e-mail and sent it.

A brown grease-stained paper bag lay by the front door. Eric took Chloe into the lounge and rocked her gently on his lap as he ate lukewarm cheeseburger and chips. He wondered what Pongo was doing at the moment.

Helen tried to breast-feed Chloe as she ate her breakfast cereal. Chloe sensed her hurry and refused to eat. Eric sat opposite her drinking a cup of coffee.

"How do you know it wasn't a practical joke?" said Helen.

"I don't think it was. I can check it out on the Internet."

"Wait until after six o'clock. The phone bill is expensive enough as it is without you running up extra calls." She checked her watch. "Damn. I've got to get a move on. I need to mark Year Seven's books so I can give them back this morning. There's four bottles of expressed milk in the fridge. Maybe you can get Chloe to eat."

She handed him the baby, picked up her bag and hurried from the room.

Eric looked around the kitchen. Last night's washing up was still in the sink; a blackened tidemark of burnt lasagne circled the big white dish he had forgotten to soak. Eric had always intended to keep the house spotless when he took over the job of looking after Chloe. Instead he found himself always racing to catch up with yesterday's chores.

Chloe had fallen asleep. Eric carried her gently up the stairs and guiltily turned on the computer. There was

an e-mail waiting in his in-tray.

Dear Eric:

I am delighted you have decided to be my pen pal. I was very interested to hear about your social grouping, and the tensions within it. Let me tell you about my grouping. I have no mate or children. There are three other gorillas here, two females and a male. There is no Silverback in our group, that role is mostly filled by Doctor Jennifer (don't tell her I said that!). I enjoy it here at the CRI and do not wish to move back to the jungle under any circumstances. (Doctor Jennifer told me to say that!)

I have a question. What does it mean to be "between jobs"? Is this the human equivalent of searching for better foraging? I asked Doctor Jennifer to explain, but she said I would be better to ask you. I look forward to hearing from you.

Pongo :-)

Eric read the e-mail through twice. Had Pongo really attempted two jokes, or had that been the computer's translation? Eric had always thought that only humans had a sense of humour. He realized he had better look up something about gorillas on the Internet later on. In the meantime, he realized he was going to have to answer Pongo's question about him being between jobs. Chloe drooled in his lap as he typed his reply.

Dear Pongo

Isn't the Silverback the dominant male? If so, I think it was very mean to say that about Doctor Jennifer. I'm sure she's really a nice lady. :-)

When I say I am between jobs, I mean that I do not have a job. I am looking for work but there is not much demand for English graduates around here. We are tied to this place by Helen's job and the cost of housing elsewhere.

All this must seem very strange to you. You don't have to pay to sleep in the jungle, and there are bananas to eat whenever you want them. I sometimes wonder how civilized we humans really are compared to gorillas.

Eric

Eric gazed at the e-mail wondering how it had come out so negative. Little Chloe gurgled softly on his lap. She smelt as though she needed changing. Eric sent his e-mail and turned off the computer.

Helen dropped her bags on the kitchen table and flopped into a chair. Green exercise books spilled out onto the floor. Eric held up Chloe beneath the arms.

"Say hello to Mummy," he said.

Helen held out her arms. "How's my big girl? Has Daddy been busy looking after you?" She gave a sideways glance at the sink full of washing up as she spoke.

"We didn't want to go to sleep this afternoon, did we, Chloe?" said Eric guiltily. "We've been playing with Daddy."

Chloe smelt the milk on Helen and began to move her mouth. Helen lifted her blouse and fixed Chloe on a breast.

"There we are, Chlo-Chlo. Has Daddy been speaking to his Gorilla friend?"

Eric turned on the grill and laid out three strips of pork. "Daddy scheduled a flash session earlier to pick up his e-mail. He's going on-line later to find out about gorillas."

"I found out something about gorillas today. I asked Dave Garrett in the Science department. Do you know that gorillas belong to the family Pongidae? That must be where your friend got her name from."

"Pongidae. I see. That's clever," said Eric. The potatoes were already peeled and in the pan. He turned on the gas to set the water boiling. "Did you learn anything else?"

Helen grunted. Chloe must have bitten her nipple. She stroked the baby's back as she spoke.

"Not really, although one of my sixth formers reminded me that there was a gorilla mentioned in *Lolita*."

"I don't remember that."

"Neither did I at first. It was mentioned in Nabokov's notes at the end of the book.

Apparently *Lolita* was inspired by a story Nabokov read in a newspaper.

Some scientists taught a gorilla to draw pictures. Can you guess what was the first picture it drew?"

"A banana?"

"No. The bars of its cage. You should ask your friend about that the next time you speak to her."

Helen was marking books downstairs on the kitchen table. Eric listened for Chloe as he waited for his computer to start up. There was an e-mail waiting, just as he hoped.

Dear Eric:

I never considered humans to be civilized! I will never understand how some of your species consider the works of art they own to be a greater measure of their civilization than the way in which they treat their fellow human beings.

I would also like to point out that whilst I do enjoy the odd banana, my diet consists primarily of succulent plants, berries and leaves. I was born and raised by the CRI. I have never slept in the jungle and do not like the idea of doing so. I much prefer being waited on by Doctor Jennifer and her subordinates.

Lastly, yes, a Silverback is the dominant male in the group. Am I right in thinking that in human circles there can be a female Silverback? Is Helen your Silverback? Write soon – Pongo

Eric grinned wryly as he read the letter. Pongo had a refreshing way of looking at things. He liked the comments about civilization. However, it was the last lines that particularly caught his attention. He had always been pleased with the way he had shared responsibility in the relationship with Helen. It was odd how outsiders saw him to be subordinate to her because of that.

He opened two windows on the screen. In between running searches for information on gorillas, he began to type his reply to Pongo's e-mail. He began with an apology.

Dear Pongo:

I am very sorry for my comments about bananas. I feel as if I am being racist or speciesist, if there is such a word. (My spell checker suggests spacesuits as a replacement.)

I thought your comments on Silverbacks were interesting. Most modern families share the responsibilities between both

partners. You could say that both Helen and I are Silverbacks. I must admit, though, I do find it hard, not being in work. Many human males don't like to be supported by their partners.

We're not supposed to admit this, but it's true. Helen finds the situation difficult too. I still think she's jealous of the time I get to spend with Chloe.

Eric paused to re-read what he had just typed. He frowned and then continued to type.

I've just read through this letter. It's odd, Pongo. I've never admitted what I just wrote to anyone else. It's strange that I should confide in you.

Yours, Eric

Eric looked at the e-mail for a moment and then sent it before he could change his mind about doing so.

Helen brought the letter into the kitchen as Eric fed mashed up Weetabix to Chloe.

"There's a letter for you," she said excitedly. "It's postmarked Slough. I think it's from Wannell's. Open it!"

Eric dropped the spoon and wiped his hands on his trousers. Chloe blew brown bubbles as he fumbled at the envelope.

He pulled out the letter.

"Well?" said Helen, peering anxiously over his shoulder. "I got the job," said Eric, carefully.

Helen hugged him. "Who's my clever darling. I knew you could do it." She kissed him on the cheek and squeezed him again. Something in his manner made her pause.

"What's the matter? You don't seem very pleased."

Eric forced a smile. "I don't know. It's good, I suppose. The money will come in handy and it's a step on the ladder, but it's hardly the job I wanted to do. There'll be a lot of travelling. I won't see you and Chloe so much."

Helen took his hand. "I thought you'd be over the moon. It will stop you moping around the house. Anyway, the travelling won't be forever. If you do well they'll probably base you somewhere permanent next year."

"I know," said Eric, forcing a smile. "You'd better be going. You'll be late for school."

Helen looked at the clock. "You're right. We can talk about this tonight." She smiled warmly and gave Eric another hug. "You're still in shock. Look, don't bother cooking tonight. We can send out for an Indian. I think you deserve it. It's ages since you had a curry."

She kissed him on the cheek and hustled from the room. She opened the front door and called back to him from the hall.

"Why not write and tell Pongo about your job?"

Eric stared at the letter for sometime until Chloe's banging with a spoon finally caught his attention. Maybe Pongo would understand. He tidied up and headed upstairs to turn on the computer. He was delighted to see an e-mail waiting for him.

Dear Eric:

I am proud that you see fit to confide in me. It makes me feel

guilty for not understanding why you do not want to be supported by Helen. I don't feel upset at being supported by Doctor Jennifer. I do understand, however, about Helen being jealous of the time you spend with Chloe. I would like children of my own. I have asked Doctor Jennifer to arrange for a suitable male to be introduced here, but she says I must wait. I think this is very unfair. What do you say?

Your confidant, Pongo

Eric gave a wry smile as he read Pongo's e-mail. He was imagining the conversation between the gorilla and Doctor Jennifer. Would it be like arguing with Chloe in later years about the boys she wanted to date? He corrected himself. This was no child he was speaking to. Pongo was an adult. Surely she was entitled to do as she pleased. He typed his reply.

Dear Pongo:

I was offered a job today. It should make me happy. All I can see is time it will keep me from my family. It's ironic that I'm taking the job for the sake of my family. Why am I saying this? It helps me understand your feelings. I do think you should be allowed a mate, however I do think you should ask Doctor Jennifer why she refuses you a partner. Maybe she can't afford to keep another gorilla. I don't know. It seems very unfair. It reminds me of something Helen told me. She told me about a gorilla that was taught to draw, and the first thing it drew was the bars of its cage. Does this describe you? Are you really happy at the CRI?

Your friend, Eric

Eric sent the e-mail without thinking. In his attempt to analyze Pongo, he forgot Dr Jennifer Barnes's warning about Pongo analyzing him.

Pongo's final e-mail came that evening. Eric had spent the day wandering the house in a daze, the job offer still in his back pocket, trying to make sense of his life. He wasn't to know that a gorilla was about to do that for him. He turned on the computer and downloaded his e-mail.

Dear Eric:

I'm beginning to realize how different it is to be a human. I am grateful to you for giving me this chance to see how you think. Your story of the gorilla that learned to paint made many things clear to me. I will try to explain.

In our correspondence I have tried to paint you a picture of life as a gorilla.

All you have described to me has been a picture of the bars of your cage.

With the greatest respect and sympathy, Pongo

Eric Sims read the message with a rueful grin. It was true. He was in the cage; and Pongo was outside, looking in.

Tony Ballantyne made his *Interzone* debut last month with "The Sixth VNM," and the above is his second story for us. His previously published work consists of a few stories in women's magazines. He lives with his wife and child in East Ham, London.

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Alexander Glass

It doesn't seem real, now. It seems like something I dreamed, or maybe something that dreamed me. As time goes on, and fewer of us are left to remember, it seems more and more like something we imagined. I still meet up with some of the others, now and then, whenever I think I can take it – a bunch of old men in young men's bodies, with nothing to talk about except the past, the stench of stale time rising from their clothes; all of them swilling cheap beer and nodding as they hear the old stories told over again, and again, and again. All those men have stories to tell about what happened to them, but the stories fall kind of flat when they look up and see me there, listening. I don't mean for that to happen, but it happens just the same. Maybe they feel a little embarrassed, talking about themselves, when they remember what happened to Rego and Newman and me.

Out of the three of us, I'm the only one that ever makes it to the meetings. Newman got himself married and went overseas with his wife; and anyway he doesn't talk much any more. Rego didn't last long after we came back. They found his body in an old warehouse, which it turned out he'd been renting. He'd found a big, round mirror from somewhere, and laid it out flat on the floor. Then he'd climbed up into the rafters somehow – no one was quite sure how he'd got himself up there – and taken a dive, from the highest point he could find. They said he hadn't suffered much. The mirror couldn't be fixed: the glass was all shattered, and some of the fragments were oddly curved, as if there had been a ripple in the surface when Rego's body hit it. That was back in '91. I went to Rego's funeral. There weren't too many people there, and they kept the coffin closed.

The three of us signed up together, and went through training together, and eventually went to war together. It's hard to say why we decided to go; Newman's parents were not happy about it, and mine weren't too thrilled either. There was no conscription – they could hardly conscript for what was, at the time, a secret war – but we went anyway. We had no idea what was coming. The training was practically non-existent. We were given

weapons, and taught how to use them, though as it turned out they weren't much use to anyone. We were taught about navigation, and how to follow the homing beacon, though that wasn't much use either. And then we were taught about the enemy. That's the part I remember best, because they told us so little, as though they were deliberately keeping the truth from us. Every accidental detail, every little thing they let slip, sank straight to the bottom of my mind and stayed there: the Scissorbirds, the Living Fingerprints, the Bone Men, the Automata, the Ouroburos. The guy who was supposed to be telling us all this had just got back from the war himself; and later, I understood why he couldn't tell us any more than he did. I can't remember his name, but I remember his face vividly: the way his eyes would flicker back and forth all the time, as if he was seeing things in the corner of the room; the way he used to bite on his lips, and shiver and stammer, and fall over his words. Both of his thumbs were missing. We assumed he'd been tortured by the enemy, and that was a sobering thought. We didn't imagine that the truth could be worse.

When the day came, we thought we were ready. Nervous, even scared a little, but ready to deal with whatever they threw at us – even though we still hadn't been told exactly where the war was taking place, or why. That was kept secret, from the public and from us, until too many people found out about it. After it came out, there was a huge outcry, but by then it was too late. The war ended, officially at least, before anyone found out that it had happened. Anyway, when we were sent in, we weren't told where we were going. There were a couple of odd little things we noticed. No transportation had arrived to carry us to the fight, no planes, not even trucks. We didn't understand, but we didn't think much about it. The other thing was, we were told to make a list of anyone in the squad who was left-handed. No one told us why; it turned out later that someone had a theory, but nothing ever came of it.

I had time to send one last letter home before they moved us out. No transportation had turned up.

Instead, we were taken across the training ground to a bunker in the hills, and marched down into the ground. Another three squads were right behind us; I don't think they had any more idea of what was going on than we did. We were led into a huge hall, like a warehouse or some kind of hangar, and told to form a line. It was dark, and we couldn't see further than the head of the person in front of us. The person in front of me was Rego, and as the line moved slowly forward, I heard him whisper a curse between his teeth. A minute later, as the line moved forward again, I saw what he was cursing at. It was an ancient mirror, set into the wall at the far end of the hangar. The guy in front of Rego was staring at his own frightened reflection, and the Lieutenant took him by the shoulder, and pushed him into the mirror. Rego and I saw the glass turn misty as he reached it, and the ripples spreading out as he fell through. There was a sudden smell of rain. I think the guy shouted something, but as soon as he was on the other side of the mirror, his voice was cut off. The ripples faded away, the mist cleared, and Rego was left staring at his own frightened reflection. Then the Lieutenant pushed him through, as well. I stared hard into the glass, as if by doing that I could see where they had gone. I felt a hand on my shoulder, and a second later I had lost my balance, and was tumbling into the glass. The moment I touched my reflection I felt a strange twisting sensation, as if I was being turned inside-out. Then, as soon as it had begun, it was over, and I was on the far side of the mirror.

"Johnson. I thought you'd never get here."

It was Rego, throwing an arm around my shoulder and pulling me away from the mirror. I took one last look back, but all I saw was my own reflection. We were in a hangar like the one I had just left, but this one was hung with strings of bare yellow bulbs, and full of soldiers hanging around, talking, drinking, playing cards. The air tasted different. There was music coming from a cheap radio sitting in a corner. Rego grinned at me, raising his eyebrows, and swung me around to show me everything. His eyes were bright, and there was alcohol on his breath.

"I've been waiting ten hours already. There's some kind of temporal refraction between the two sides of the mirror. I guess you waited, what, half a minute before you came in after me."

I shook my head, confused. "What is this place?"

"This is base camp, my friend. This is where we'll be living for the next couple of weeks, until we're acclimatized. Then we get to go out there" – and he made a vague gesture at one of the walls – "and kill some bad guys. Whoever they are."

"Great." I shook him off and moved over to the bar, still disorientated. "Newman was behind the guy who was behind me, so I guess he'll be here the day after tomorrow."

Rego nodded. "That's the other reason we're not going straight into combat. They have to wait for everyone to get here."

The beer had calmed me down a little, and I wandered out of the hangar, and through the compound,

with Rego sauntering along behind. He was telling the truth about the time: it was already evening here, and a cold moon watched over the cheerless wooden buildings. Everything seemed normal: there were guards on duty up on top of the compound wall, staring out into the forest; the harsh glare of a spotlight swung past, searching the treeline for signs of life. I let Rego show me to my bed, and dumped my things there.

"Johnson?" he said.

"What is it?" I asked, as we passed the Medical Officers' hut. The door was open, and I could see what looked like a corpse stretched out on a table, covered by a grey army cloth. Someone threw the cloth back, and I craned my head, trying to see what the injuries were like. A moment later the same guy came running out and threw up at the foot of the tent. I frowned, curious, but Rego wasn't interested.

"How's your math, Johnson?"

"Pretty good," I told him, not to show off, but because it really was. That was one of the reasons my parents didn't want me to sign up. "Why?"

Rego looked at me, and for the first time I saw the veil of drunkenness fall away, to reveal fear underneath. "They say if you're good at math, it helps. You can live longer; you can stay in one piece; you can keep from going crazy. I saw some of the people who've been out there, and come back." He broke off and stared at the bottle in his hand. I waited for him to finish. "Johnson, I need you to help me. I was never any good in school, you know that. I need to learn something before we get sent out there. I don't want to become like that."

"Like what?" I demanded, angry now because some of his fear was rubbing off on me. "What can have happened to them, that had anything to do with mathematics? Did they get lost?"

"No. The ones who get lost don't come back."

"Then what? Where are these people?"

"Over there," he said, quietly, and for some reason I hesitated before I looked. Over there was what looked like a group of older men, though when I looked more closely I saw that they couldn't have been that much older than us. They seemed different, though. They weren't drinking, which seemed strange; maybe, I thought, they'd found themselves something stronger than alcohol, and were waiting to come down. But they didn't look stoned, just scared. One of them was missing a thumb. Another had a red weal around his neck, as if someone had tried to hang him. A third had blood caked around his lips, and he kept swallowing, over and over – you could see the muscles of his throat moving. At first I thought they must have been taken prisoner, and tortured, but then I wasn't so sure.

"What happened to that one?" I asked.

Rego looked away. "They cut his tongue out. He wasn't captured. That was just something that happened in the forest. That's how they fight. They cut pieces off. If they capture you, you don't stay alive very long. Your body will turn up back at the base, but its head will be missing." He bit his lip. "You remember they made such a fuss about getting three sets of fingerprints from us? That's why. They need to be able to identify us if we're

caught and killed."

"And just how is learning math supposed to help us?"

"I don't know. But it does. That's what they all say."

I shrugged, and shook my head. "If you want me to teach you, I'll teach you. But I still can't see why it should do any good."

Before heading back to the bar, I looked out over the forest. There was something about the trees that was not quite right, but I couldn't put my finger on it. They were too angular somehow. After a moment, I realized what it was: they were perfectly regular, as if they were geometric structures rather than actual living trees. The trunk of each tree divided to form three main branches, each of which divided to form three smaller branches, each of which divided to form three twigs, each of which had three perfect green leaves. All the trees were the same as each other: exactly the same. No wonder people got lost in the forest.

Two weeks later, we were out in the trees, and by this time I was as scared as Rego. The stories we heard from the other soldiers – or rather, the stories they refused to tell us – were frightening precisely because we didn't know the full details. We had to fill in the gaps for ourselves, and as time went on we filled the gaps with worse and worse things. Apart from that, we started to see for ourselves what kind of creatures lived in this place. You saw strange things if you were watching from the wall: glimpses of huge, terrifying beasts deep beneath the cover of the trees, birdlike creatures with outsized claws, which made a sound that could only be described as a burble. Somehow that sound was more disturbing than a screech or a roar. Then there were sightings of red or white creatures underneath the trees, some moving so fast that they could hardly be seen, others moving slowly, resting for hours between each step, still others on horseback. Sometimes a man in a kind of medieval costume would appear just outside the gates, and wave cheerfully up at us; then, as we raised our rifles, he would turn to one side, and simply vanish. Worse than all of that, though, was the way things could appear inside the compound. These were less predictable, and everyone saw something different – but everyone saw something. For some reason it only happened if you were alone; so people stayed together as much as possible. The one I saw looked like a dog I'd had when I was a kid. His head was open, and covered with worms. When I blinked, he disappeared.

We set out early, in a particular direction. No one had found a way of making compasses work here, so the only way we could tell where to go was by mapping our position relative to the compound. There was a map, but not a map of the kind we were used to: the only thing it had on it was the compound itself. There were other regular landmarks, but they seemed to change position, day by day. Scouts were sent out to try and find them each morning. There was a pit, which opened out into a tunnel; no one knew where it led. A group of men had been sent down there, but never returned. There was a clearing in the forest where giant mushrooms, each one twice the height of a person, grew. There was a building,

which looked like an abandoned train station; at least, it had a railway track beside it, leading away into the distance. The angle of the track relative to the compound kept changing, too. There was a sundial without a gnomon, which nevertheless told the time by a shadow moving across its face; no one could see what was casting the shadow.

Then there were other landmarks, ones the soldiers talked about but which the officers would never admit existed. There was supposed to be a great lake, with a fringe of tall black grasses at its edge: the water had been analysed, they said, and found to be chemically identical to human tears. There was said to be a wall, which some of the men called the Final Frontier. You could climb the wall, and look beyond it, but there was nothing there. Nothing at all. If you leaned out over the edge, you could feel the nothing trying to suck you in. The story that was most vigorously denied was the one about the little girl asleep in the woods, floating inside a bubble of glass. They were so desperate for that story to be forgotten that we figured it had to be true.

Out in the forest, it was worse than inside the compound. Newman said it was because there were fewer of us together; he said things would be just a little worse in the compound too, after we'd left, since there were fewer people there, too. We tried to keep close together; if you were cut off from your squad, things came for you. If you stayed together, they still came for you, but they were easier to manage, mostly. Not always, but mostly.

The first sign of trouble came when we were just out of sight of the compound, heading towards the new camp that was supposed to have been set up near the mushroom fields. The idea was that if we could get enough people together at one of the landmarks, the place would stop moving about, and we could start to get a proper map together. I didn't fully understand the reasoning behind that, but it wasn't for me to ask questions. We could still detect the homing beacon; I was in charge of the locator. As we went on, though, I began to notice that the bleep coming from the little box was growing fainter. I made a technical adjustment by slamming my fist against the side of the box, but nothing happened. The bleep didn't get any louder, and it didn't stop altogether. It just went on getting quieter. I turned to Newman, who was just behind me, and tried to say something; but my voice sounded very faint, as if it were coming from far away. We had entered a silent zone. They were relatively harmless: all that happened was, you were creeping stealthily through the trees, and you began to think it was too quiet. Then you realized it really was too quiet, that there was no sound at all in that part of the forest. Generally, if you just kept on walking, the zone would come to an end. Sometimes, though, one of the forest creatures, or an enemy soldier, would use the silence as cover, and take you by surprise.

In the silence, I started to get nervous. Newman tapped me on the shoulder, and I jumped. Unable to speak, he pointed up into the sky. Something was flying overhead, something that glinted silver as it moved. It came closer, picking up the colours of the forest, deep green and reds and browns, and I began to see that it

wasn't just one thing but a whole flock of them. Someone up ahead screamed, soundlessly; the man ahead turned to me with fear all over his face and mouthed the word: Scissorbirds.

That was all it took. Our unit was already spooked at having encountered its first silent zone. Now the Scissorbirds were coming after us. They had metallic bodies – some of us kept fallen feathers as souvenirs – and huge pairs of razor-sharp scissors instead of beaks. As they flew low over our heads, we scattered in all directions. Someone was probably shouting orders at us, but no one could hear them. Instead we ran, breaking into little groups, threes and fours. By instinct, Newman and Rego and me stayed together, and a kid called O'Hara tagged along with us. We stumbled out of the silent zone, and heard the screams of wounded soldiers from all around us. The Corporal ran across our path, his mutilated hands held up before him. We could hear the slicing, clacking sounds of the Scissorbirds' beaks, so we kept on running. Trying to keep control, I told myself over and over that we could make it back. I think I was probably mumbling the words aloud. There were four of us, after all: better than one or two. We were armed, though the Scissorbirds were either bulletproof or so fast on the wing that it didn't matter, and in any case you couldn't shoot them all – there were too many of them. We had a medical kit, and some supplies; and we had the locator, so we could just follow the homing beacon back to the compound. If we ran across any more silent zones, we'd work our way around them. Simple, except that we had to get away from the birds before we could do anything else.

We thought we were out of danger; we came to a halt in a small clearing, and waited there, breathing hard and staring at each other. For a moment, nothing happened. Then there was a small snip from overhead, and a single leaf floated down to the ground. O'Hara gasped, and at once the birds were upon him. There must have been ten or twelve Scissorbirds, and most of them went for the kid. I dived into the trees, firing blindly into the air behind me, and heard a bullet ricochet off a bird's body. Maybe I damaged it a little, because it flew past me, and away. I ran back to the clearing, and saw what was left of O'Hara. He was dead. The birds had held him down, so that one of them could reach into his mouth and peck out his tongue. His thumbs were gone, too. Rego was unhurt. So was Newman.

"Why did they all go for him?" Newman wondered aloud, as we followed the beacon back towards the compound. I shrugged, but Rego stared at him.

"Did you ever talk back to your parents?" Rego asked us both. "Were you ever rude to them?"

"No. Well, yeah, of course. But not much," I said.

"Did you suck your thumb when you were too old for that?"

"No," I said. Newman shook his head, but he looked uncomfortable.

Rego looked away. "Then it's true," he whispered, and walked on without another word. He was scared. We were all scared, but something was troubling Rego that didn't worry me or Newman. He wouldn't tell us what

it was, though, and I decided it wasn't our business to make him tell.

We walked for hours, until the light began to fade. We didn't see anyone or anything, but I was sure we should have reached the compound long before now. Maybe the locator was malfunctioning after all. Maybe I shouldn't have repaired it with my fist. Or maybe, as the beacon indicated, the compound was still some way ahead of us.

"Johnson," Newman whispered, "do these trees look bigger to you?"

I nodded. "Why?"

"That means we're going in the right direction. I heard about it from a guy in the bar. When the trees get bigger, it means you're going the way you should be going." He grabbed my shoulder and pulled me to a halt, and stared at me, seriously. "Johnson. It also means you'll never get to where you're going. Because it isn't only the trees that get bigger. Everything gets bigger. Or maybe you get smaller. Either way, the further you go, the further away your destination becomes. Understand?"

I nodded. "I understand, but I'm not sure I believe it."

"Believe it, Johnson. I do."

"Okay. Maybe you're right. So what do we do?"

"This is another kind of zone. We go back the other way, to where the trees don't change size any more. Then we find a way round."

Rego shook his head. "I can't stay out here. I have to get back."

"Stay calm," I told him, though I wasn't feeling too calm myself. "If you want to keep on going that way, then go. The two of us are going to try and leave the zone. You don't want to be alone out here, do you, Rego?"

He shook his head, crestfallen. "No. I'll stay with you."

"That's better. Now: how big are the zones?"

"No one got the chance to measure them properly," Newman said. "But we do know they're approximately square in shape; that they cover the forest floor completely, like tiles, or the squares of a chessboard; that a stream separates each one from the next; and that they're all the same size."

Rego shouted, "How can they be all the same size if one of them gets bigger as you go further into it?"

I shook my head. "Rego's right, but all that means is that we must be getting smaller, rather than the zone getting bigger. That suggests that if we keep on going, we'll eventually disappear altogether. So I don't think we should go on. This zone should be the same size as a silent zone. It should only be a few minutes' walk back to the nearest stream."

We walked for a few minutes, until the trees began to look like they were the right size again. But we had no idea where we were going. In fact, if one of the stories I'd heard was true, we had no idea where we were going anyway, even with the homing beacon. Some of the men said that there was a part of the forest where the trees started leaning inwards, towards a central point; and once you got there, you started to feel something pulling you forward. It wasn't a zone; it was something the enemy had constructed in one of the neutral zones. The closer you went, the stronger the pull became, until you found yourself lifted off your feet and dragged through

the air. You hit the rock that was sitting there, and your body was crushed against it. The important thing was, the rock was so massive that it distorted the signal from the homing beacon, as well as the light, and the passage of time. So the locator was about as useful as a compass in a strong magnetic field. I didn't believe the story - and I wasn't going to say anything to make Rego more jumpy than he already was - but there was always the possibility that we would never find our way home.

Rego, ahead of us, turned and shouted: "There's something here."

"What is it?"

"A helicopter, crashed - looks like the Ouroburos got to everyone on board."

"Can we fix it?"

"I doubt it. Look at that. It's a wreck. The radio might be working, though..."

He leaned into the twisted wreck of the helicopter, past the headless body of the pilot. It looked like he was right: the Ouroburos had killed them all. For some reason people said there was only one of the things, though I preferred to think there were thousands of them. They were snakes, snakes that wrapped themselves around a part of your anatomy, preferably your neck, and then started eating their own tails. They could kill in seconds. None had ever been captured: the moment anyone tried, they vanished into their own mouths.

"It's no use," Rego sighed, climbing back out of the ruin of the helicopter. "The radio looked as if it was working, but all I can hear is static. But I did find this." He held up a black steel box, very heavy, locked shut with about half a dozen locks. "It's a cat box. They finally caught one of the damn things."

"I can't believe it. How did they get it into the box?"

Newman interrupted: "What things? What have they caught?"

"A Cheshire Cat," I told him. "They're the enemy's psychological warfare division. They don't attack, they just materialize on a nearby tree and tell you lies about the war, about how it's hopeless, about how your mother has died, or your girlfriend has stopped waiting for you... Then you decide you've had enough, and bring your gun up to shoot, but the cat's already beginning to fade away. This one must be the first one they've caught. The helicopter must have been crashed when the enemy tried to rescue it. But how they caught it in the first place, I'll never understand." I frowned. "Wait a minute. How do we know it's still in there? They can vanish at will."

Rego shrugged. "What do you want to do? Open the box? Then we'll know. But then the cat could jump out and escape. The best thing would be to carry the box back to the compound, and let someone else deal with it."

"They're not going to be pleased if the box is empty," I said. "They might blame us for the cat having escaped."

Newman said, "Who gets to carry it?"

No one volunteered, so we carried it in shifts. It weighed more than any cat had a right to weigh.

Night had fallen by the time we reached the compound. Something was wrong: it was too quiet, and not because we were in a silent zone. The forest was empty, and from outside it looked as if the compound was

empty, too. There were no lights; there were no guards patrolling the walls. Maybe it was a trap: maybe they were expecting an enemy attack that night, and all the men were lying hidden, waiting to spring up with their guns blazing; but somehow I didn't think so.

The main gate was hanging open. Out of habit, I locked it behind us, hoping the enemy would stay away a while longer. The compound didn't feel so safe any more. Maybe it wasn't our men lying hidden, but the enemy. Or maybe it was just that the place was deserted: we couldn't rely on the sheer number of people here to create a safe area. The enemy could come sneaking in whenever they wanted. I imagined staying the night here, one of us keeping watch while the other two slept. It wouldn't work. That one person left awake would be all alone with his fears, and I didn't want to be sleeping when Rego's fears started coming out of the walls.

"They've gone," Rego said, flatly. "They've gone, and left us behind."

We ran into the bar, and switched on the lights. Now, with nobody there, and with no alcohol to soften my vision, it didn't look like such a cheerful place. The radio in the corner had been kicked in, maybe trampled by someone in their haste to get to the mirror. The mirror was still there, but it was broken, cracked from side to side. The crack looked like a crooked grin in the blank face of the looking-glass. Our reflections stared back at us, horrified, and scared.

"They locked the door behind them," Newman whispered.

We sat around in the bar and waited, into the smallest hours. I didn't know exactly what we were waiting for. A rescue would have been nice. An enemy attack was more likely. An inspiration would have been best of all, an idea that would get us out of there. I drank until I got insect eyes, and then I had a nasty thought - the drink might summon up worse creatures from the forest - and I stopped.

"They found the mirror in Oxford," Newman was saying, his voice slow now, every word spoken with the precision of a drunken man. "Charles Dodgson left it to a friend, and it was passed down from person to person without anyone ever trying to step through. Or maybe they tried, and nothing happened. I don't know how the Army got their hands on the mirror, but they knew an opportunity when they saw it. A totally new land, unspoilt and unexploited, except for Alice's adventure - and I guess Dodgson had gone in himself, and left his mark on the place. The Army repaired the mirror somehow, and sent someone in to scout the place out, as if it was hostile territory. Someone without much interest in mathematics, I guess. The scout met a bad end, and came back with his head missing; so the Army decided the place had to be subdued: it was dangerous. They didn't stop to think that a mirror only reflects what it sees."

"Is that true?" Rego asked, and Newman shrugged.

I had an idea. It wasn't a particularly good one, but it felt better to be doing something than just sitting around waiting to be killed. So I put the steel box down

in front of me and began to shoot away the locks.

"What are you doing?" Rego demanded.

"What does it look like?"

He swung me round and threw me against the bar. I could hear the crack as the small of my back connected with the hard wooden surface, and I groaned. Rego glared at me.

"What do you think opening it's going to achieve? It's going to bring all the others in here."

"Maybe," I conceded, "but the Cheshire cats have been known to give advice. We're out of ideas of our own. And look at it this way: they don't necessarily want to kill us. They just want us out of here. And that's all we want, isn't it? If there's another way out, maybe they can show it to us."

"And what if there's no other way out?"

"Then we're already dead, Rego. They'll come for us sooner or later."

Rego considered this. "All right. But wait until I finish my beer."

"Okay."

We took it in turns to fire at the box, until all the locks were broken. Then we stood there for a while, looking at each other. No one wanted to be the one to actually open the lid. I realized that the others were waiting for me. I knelt down, keeping my head as far from the box as I could, ready to duck if something horrible leapt out at me. Nothing did, though. There was just a cat, ginger and white, grinning up at us from out of the box.

"There's no other way out," it said at once. "Rego was right. He's right about so many things. He was right to escape into the Army before the police found him."

"What?" I said, staring at Rego.

"Don't listen to it," he said, but he wouldn't meet my eyes.

The cat went on, "The woman died in hospital. She didn't give anyone your name, but the police suspect you. They can't prove anything, of course. But they'll be watching you."

Rego shuddered.

"They don't like you, Rego. It might be best if they thought you were missing in action. I wouldn't go back, if I were you. Stay here with us. The woman is here, too. She's one of the Bone Men now."

Rego screamed, and took aim at the cat, but the creature was already fading out. I knocked his gun away, and shouted: "What do you mean? You said there was no way back."

"I said there was no *other* way back," grinned the cat, "and there isn't. But you can still go back through the mirror. It's cracked, but it still reflects. The image is only slightly distorted by the damage."

Then it vanished, leaving nothing but the ghost of its grin upon the air.

There was a great commotion from outside the compound. We could hear the scraping of the Scissorbirds, the clicking and whirring of the Automata, and, behind them all, a larger sound – the sound of something huge hammering at the gate, and burbling. Worst of all, we could hear the dry voices of the Bone Men, as they called out to their loved ones. Rego was frozen still, staring at

the door. From somewhere, a young woman's voice was calling his name.

I already had my hand on the mirror, making sure the cat hadn't lied. Sure enough, the mist was beginning to form, and a tiny ripple spread out from where my fingers touched the glass. I looked back to see Rego heading for the door, towards the voice that was calling him. Newman was staring at him as he went, unsure whether to stop him or not. Cursing, I ran back, and caught Rego around the waist. Newman recovered himself, and helped me throw Rego through the mirror. I clapped Newman on the shoulder, and dived in myself. As I went through, I thought I heard the door begin to shake, as something pounded on it with bony fingers. Something was still calling Rego's name.

I landed on a rubbish heap. It was still night-time, though I couldn't be sure whether it was the same time we had left, or earlier, or later, or even a different day. I couldn't work it out. Rego was there, sprawled at the foot of the heap, asleep or unconscious. I found myself a comfortable place to sit, propped the broken mirror up beside me, and waited.

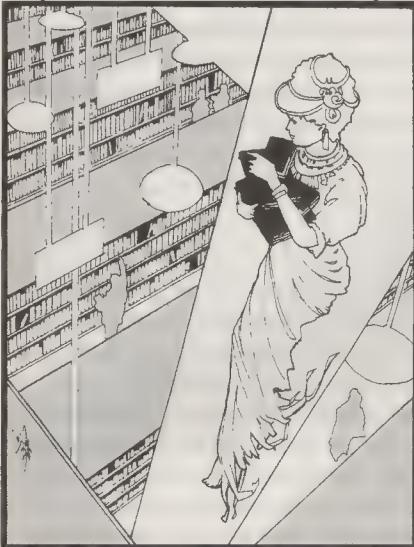
I didn't have to wait long. After a few seconds, the glass grew misty again, and Newman fell through it. He rolled to a halt in front of me, and picked himself up, screaming wordlessly. Blood was pouring from his mouth. I guess he had been a little too insolent with his parents, long ago, and it had finally caught up with him. I picked up the mirror before anything else could come through, and smashed it into fragments.

I never found out exactly what it was Rego had done. We didn't see each other much after that, and the next I heard of him was that he'd died. I think, I hope, that Newman has found some kind of peace with his new bride, but I don't really know. Like I said, he doesn't say much any more.

Now I spend my time in dead-end jobs that never last too long, and I meet up with other veterans now and again. The truth is, though, there isn't much to say at our meetings. Because we all know about how Rego died. We know about the ripple on the mirror. I think the Army would have preferred to keep that quiet, but word gets around. It means Rego almost got through. The door isn't quite closed. Maybe the Army is looking for other ways in, ways big enough for them to be able to take planes and helicopters in without having to assemble them on the spot. Or maybe the creatures on the other side have had their first taste of blood, and liked it, and are busy looking for a way out.

I don't know. Maybe I imagined it all. It doesn't seem real, now. It feels like something I dreamed, or maybe something that dreamed me.

Alexander Glass is the pseudonym of a young writer who lives in London. His first four published stories were "Carla's Eye" (*Interzone* 130), "Upgrade" (*Iz* 131), "Storage" (*Iz* 132) and "Loop" (*Iz* 134). His byline has begun to crop up in other magazines in recent months.



REVIEWED

Coincidentally enough, this column is dedicated to the varieties of grotesque experience. Variety abounds.

I reviewed *The Harlequin's Dance*, the opening of Tom Arden's projected five-volume first novel, in *Interzone* 125. Now I have before me the second volume, *The King and Queen of Swords* (Gollancz, £16.99). As usual on such occasions, I counsel against reading this without having first enjoyed that, and I reiterate my commendation of the first; Arden is a very stylish writer.

On the other hand he is still young, and at the present rate the fifth volume will be completed by a man five years older than the one who began the first. Young people evolve over such a period, and there are signs that Arden's view of his own creation has already shifted somewhat, becoming more literary and insouciant, more grotesque and humoresque. For a start, he commences with a list of characters including the likes of "WYNDA THROSH, an elderly bawd" and "BOB SCARLET, a mysterious highwayman"; Baron Stoneybroke and Widow Twankey would fit in well enough, and the impression of the *dramatis personae* from an impossibly extended pantomime is by no means reduced when the heroine dons male attire to go for a soldier in search of her beloved.

I have absolutely no objection in principle, but to shift the emphasis from straight drama to literary farce is to evoke a different primary response. In *The Harlequin's Dance* the edge of hysteria was never far

away, because my primary concern was for the dreadful things which might happen to the young principals and those dear to them; this time I mainly found myself admiring the facility with which Arden pastiches, in his choice of tropes and prose rhythms, all the great masters of classical English comedy from Aphra Behn to Thomas Love Peacock by way of Henry Fielding and Fanny Burney. (I also suspect the influence of John Cleland; but never having got round to *Memoirs of a Coxcomb*, I wouldn't swear to that.) In true 18th-century fashion, most of his setpiece descriptions describe how time and the fleshly vices can erode the physical personae and corrode the moral characters of once-powerful men and

Tom Arden, author of *The King and Queen of Swords*



once-lovely women, and I wish Rowlandson and Gillray were on hand to illustrate a deluxe edition – though if they were I'd advise against letting it fall into the hands of highly-strung children, pantomime atmosphere notwithstanding.

This being the second volume of five, it's only fair to add that the current change of tone may constitute a temporary diversion from its true course. For the same reason, there's no real point in my doing more than hint at plot development: the current indication is that it's going to hinge very strongly on a series of revelations that all the most important characters are linked in ways which very few if any of them understand so far. Such is the tradition of fairy tale and melodrama, where missing heirs, missing wills, wronged innocents and whitewashed villains have been staples for as long as the concepts of inheritance and retribution have existed. Arden is certainly on course, but his vessel may well prove to have been refitted past recognition before it makes harbour. I hope (d.v.) to carry out a stem-to-stern inspection once it's safely berthed.

Alexander Jablokov's **Deepdrive** (Avon, \$14) is described as "space noir," with which I can't really quarrel, though to my mind "physiopunk" might be better, as much of it has to do with uncomfortably intimate interaction between human and alien physiology.

Some time in the future the Solar System has been comprehensively colonized by no less than eleven alien species. All have set up shop (though mainly off Earth itself) and set about the business of living, with scant regard for human presence and none for human feelings. Most notably the Bgarth, whose bodies take the form of gigantic underground tubes, have rendered Venus habitable for themselves and (as a side-effect) for humans. Another lot dug in on Mercury may (or may not) be trying to prod the Sun into going nova. This makes for plenty of excitement, as people seek to exploit such opportunities as the alien presences afford, without, of course, bothering very much about why they've all come *here*, all at once. Somewhere along the line lawful government seems to have taken a back seat; although there's much reference to mercenary motivation the deer knows who backs the currency, and such order as exists is idiosyncratically and very patchily maintained by a gung-ho outfit called Enforcement & Joy.

Fun all round, except that the

aliens aren't cutting us in on what matters most of all. Though they arrive by FTL spacecraft, the trip is strictly one-way: the machinery self-destructs, and no one on board any of their ships knows either theory or practice. From this it follows that when Ripi-Arana-Hoc, sole representative so far of the highly advanced Vronnans, turns up on Venus and may possibly know the secret, rather a lot of people would like exclusive rights to him. We follow the fortunes of a distinctly scratch team, consisting of Soph, a middle-aged female entrepreneur down on her luck; Edward, a solipsistic adventurer; Tiber, a space-pirate; and Ambryn, a lady who plies the improbable trade of "skrying" (although it sounds more like haruspication to me) by means of alien innards. As Ambryn is described as both a lesbian and incapable of getting either dressed or undressed without presenting a vision of knockout loveliness, one would expect her to be a source of some sexual tension, that being in any case traditional to the caper story, but she has strangely little effect on any of the others.

Ripi, meanwhile, has his own agenda. The life-cycle of his species is similar to that of Frank Herbert's *PanSpechi*, and he is a renegade male who has opted out of mnemonic obliteration and death – not from selfishness (perish the thought!), but because he believes his original clan has been double-crossed by the one he married into. Now his in-laws and his daughter intend to force him to honour his obligations. The story is predictably tangled, but breaks into two parts. The first ends when the original mission fails and the principals are scattered; in the second they chase separate threads before coming together for a reasonably successful climax.

A complex tale, and with some stunning and highly original alien imagery; Jablukov piles on the wonder (and the disgust) as ever more disreputable motives and disgusting methods are disclosed, and the writing is often good enough to carry it – but not always; there are far too many sentences like this: "Otho sucked thoughtfully on a slender eyestick, blew the delicate aerosol out his nostrils, where it formed a delicate rime and gleamed for a moment before evaporating."

That sort of writing makes for heavier going than the gruesomely enjoyable romp that the author intended, but there are enough good ideas for me to commend it to the strong of stomach.

"The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted: thence proceeds mawkishness." Thus saith John Keats, and I presume that's why adults are more often ashamed of what we said, did and loved in adolescence than of anything from childhood. All the more reason to applaud Paul Stewart's *Beyond the Deepwoods* from Doubleday, which is aimed at 9+ (and with no applesauce about "young adults") and costs £10.99. That looks cheap for an original hardback with endpapers and dust jacket, and will seem even better value when I add that it's elegantly designed, printed on goodish paper and profusely illustrated with line drawings by Chris Riddell, who works in the great English tradition of grotesquerie for sprogs which runs from Tenniel through Rackham, Sime and Peake. So is he *that* good? Well, not quite; but he's very good, even so, and fully justifies his equal prominence on the cover. Why can't grown-up books be priced so generously? Alternatively, has Doubleday not noticed that Robert Rankin is quite clean enough for the kiddies?

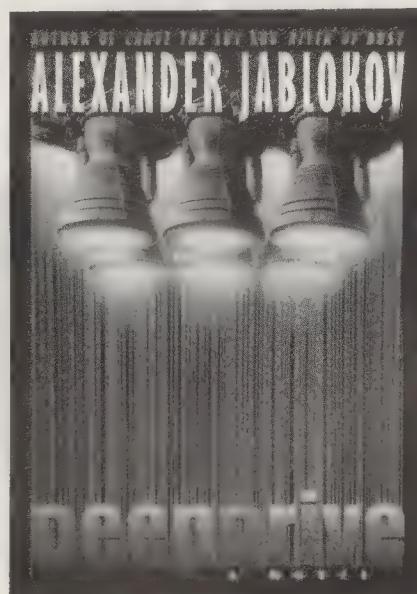
But to the story. Twig, the young protagonist, is a foundling (Aha! An eleven prince, perhaps? A hybrid bastard, noble on both sides? Read and see!) who has passed an unhappy childhood with a family of Wood Trolls in the dangerous and disagreeable Deepwoods, part of a larger world called The Edge which is evidently intended to be the setting for many more tales. Though his adoptive parents love him, he is physically

and mentally unsuited to join their world; yet there seems to be no other option, save the desperate expedient of enlisting as trainee deck-hand with a crew of sky-pirates. To get that idea out of his head he is despatched, not on any sort of quest, but to pass a few weeks with his adoptive cousins. On the way he gets lost, and becomes ever more deeply embroiled in the life of the Deepwoods, proceeding from one terrifying adventure to another with no end in view beyond the hope (often very slim) of living to see another sunrise.

Although the time-frame is too narrow for it to qualify as a *Bildungsroman*, here lies the book's great virtue – its *Schwung*, its bite – as Stewart combines the horrific and the absurd to produce an atmosphere of sustained nightmare. Twig is in continual danger of being killed and eaten (not necessarily in that order) by sundry denizens of the forest, of whom all have loathsome habits, most smell revolting, and with many of whose bodily fluids he becomes far too familiar for comfort. Moreover, though a few offer him brief kindnesses most desert or betray him, and the only one who ever offers him genuine affection is eaten alive while Twig crouches helplessly in a tree. This is strong stuff, but the writing is so full of zest, Stewart's imagination is so fertile, his love of language so inventive, that I maintain every child from 9 to 11 should be given a copy. Some will react with enthusiasm; some (having no feeling for the language) with indifference; but if any recoil from it as "a horrid book," ignore them until they learn better – it's kindest in the long run, for who needs mawkishness?

For completeness I suppose I should mention that Riddell and Stewart perpetrate one careless error each – Riddell in his drawing of the sky-pirates' ship, Stewart when near the end he forces his plot to miss its cue so as to pack in one more episode. But the book has left me feeling magnanimous; I forgive them both.

Cut from a very well designed offering to one gratuitously ill designed – and also from Doubleday, strangely enough. What good purpose can be served by rendering Jeff NOON's name like that? Jeff Noon. Geddit? Or by consigning the running heads and page numbers to the side margins instead of the top? *Pixel Juice* (£15.99) screams at the reader, "Here a pretentious no-talent tries to disguise weakness of matter by archness of manner and presentation" – which I wouldn't mind if it were true,





REVIEWED

but in fact Noon is a genuine master of the surreal with a distinctive voice, whose jokes often worked even for me and will surely do yet better with the much younger audience that I think he addresses here. Moreover, he has a good enough ear for prose rhythms and specialist vocabularies to pastiche a variety of current styles, most notably in "The Charisma Engine" and "Cloudwalkers." Against that, while he usually writes well, he doesn't always do it to much purpose.

This is a collection of 50 short pieces, most previously unpublished, and a fair number, especially of the shortest, are a bit fey – time and again I felt that here was the germ of an idea that really deserved to be worked up, but Noon either hadn't done it yet, or hadn't got it right. "Fetish Booth #7" and "Chromosoft Mirrors (v. 4.2)" both began very promisingly but petered out abruptly just as I got interested while "Xtv-vurt" and "Blurbs" were simply unconvincing. Against those, "Pimp! – The Boardgame," which offers the basic rules for a sex-oriented cross between Monopoly and the Puffin role-play books worked fine –

He was, while alive, highly-regarded by his peers but, at the time of his death on 8th May 1993, few – if any – of his books were in print. Little has changed since, and younger readers may be unfamiliar with his work. This collection of his best short stories, *The Avram Davidson Treasury* edited by Robert Silverberg and Grania Davis (Tor, \$26.95) therefore serves two purposes. It allows us to praise him again – he was, according to Lucius Shepard, "one of the finest and most idiosyncratic writers of the 20th century" – and it allows you, perhaps for the first time, to find out exactly what commentators like Shepard mean.

Davidson's first professional sale, "My Boy Friend's Name is Jello" (1954), opens the book: a brief and oblique piece, not without humour, told through the songs of two young girls. "My boy friend's name is Jello/He comes from Cincinello." Not a song that I know yet, already, it trips off the tongue. "The Golem" follows; and others arranged in chronological order – "The Necessity of His Condition" (Ellery Queen Award winner, 1958); "Or All the Seas With Oysters" (Hugo Award winner, 1958); "Take Wooden Indians"; "The Sources of the Nile"; "The Affair at Lahore Cantonment" (Edgar Award winner, for best mystery, 1962); "The House the Blakeneyes Built"; "Naples" (Howard Award

mainly because I'm pretty sure a workable board-game could be designed to its specs, though hitting the right balance between luck and skill would be a nightmare.

Much else in the book strains the most elastic definition of fiction, and it's in these areas that Noon most often over-reaches himself. Both his attempts at ad-speak, "Product Recall–Marilyn Monroe" and "Special Promotion–Hyper-Alice" fall very flat, and if you insist on producing a series of facile plays on words as he does in "Metaphorazine" it's as well to make sure you know what they mean first; Noon mis-defines "litotes." Likewise, if you insist on writing haiku you must first understand how they strive to balance the momentary against the universal, then learn how to count up to seventeen; "Dub Karaoke" suggests that Noon has misunderstood the first and has yet to become fully proficient at the second. If you write a review of your own book in bad limericks ("Pixel Dub Juice"), the limericks become no more acceptable by being bad on purpose. One includes the line "Critics should pan it," incidentally, and I'm happy to oblige, but only in part. Other jokes are about dreams, cyber-

netics, drugs and most of all sex – but it takes a bit more than the mere mention of an anus or a vagina, or even several of each, as in "From *The Book of Nymphomation*," to bring a wintry smile to these withered lips – and pee, po, belly, bum, drawers to you too, sir.

On the other hand there's a lot of energy and ingenuity on display here, and the longer pieces are generally better. These include "Junior Pimp," the most successful of several tall stories about youthful delinquency; "Bug Compass," an episode from the early life of Scribble, the protagonist of *Vurt*; "Somewhere the Shadow," a very effective allegory about the total failure of society (and partial failure of the law) to distinguish what is merely sad from what is truly wicked; and "Crawl Town," which is certainly effective as an allegory of not getting the breaks, and may have deeper meanings beyond my wavelength.

Over all, I liked this collection, but I'm sure I'd have liked it a lot better in a couple of years' time. Noon should by then have material for a full-length display of high-quality pyrotechnics, without having to dilute it with damp squibs.

Chris Gilmore

Under the Earth (1969) is a marvelous, perhaps overly-complex, alternate history of the relationship between humans and centaurs; *Peregrine: Primus* (1971) and *Peregrine: Secundus* (1981) tell the picaresque misadventures of the bastard son of the King of Sapodilla; and both *The Phoenix and the Mirror* (1969) – Davidson's most popular novel – and *Vergil in Averno* (1987) concern themselves with the magus Vergil. We now know that the first chapter of the third novel, in which Vergil encounters the Vestal Virgin, was written but what of the rest? What of *Peregrine: Tertius*? And what of the named, otherwise unknown novels *The Sixlimbed Folk* and *The Cap of Grace*?

Davidson was a difficult man. He was born in New York in 1923, served with the US Navy during the war and with the Israeli Army shortly thereafter, sold his first short story in 1954, edited *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* (F&SF) between 1962 and 1964, and lived in Mexico and British Honduras (Belize) before settling in California. He was – apparently – most productive during the 1960s, creating not a future history but an alternate past of a Europe subtly different from our own. Yet he – an Orthodox Jew – refused to allow his work to be published in Germany and once, purposely, dropped and

How Good a Writer Was Avram Davidson?

Andrew Tidmarsh

winner, 1979) – 38 in all, that demonstrate the wide range of his accomplishments. Yet the book is, somewhat ironically, brought to a close with the first chapter of an as-yet-unpublished novel, *The Scarlet Fig*, that demonstrates an abiding weakness.

Davidson worked best at shorter length. At least 15 of his novels might be thought "science fiction" or "fantasy" though the dividing line between the genres is often unclear. They stand alone – *Masters of the Maze* (1965), *Rogue Dragon* (1965), *Clash of Star Kings* (1966) – or form the first and second parts of ne'er-to-be-completed trilogies. *The Island*

broke Harlan Ellison's typewriter because it had been made in Germany. He was never a bestseller, never became the object of worship for a specialist press who would keep his books in print. When he died three unpublished novels were with him, in cardboard boxes, in his apartment! Whatever happened to them?

His shorter works remain, and this is an exceptional collection, one of the strongest single-author collections to appear for many years. Each story is accompanied by the words of another writer – Damon Knight, Fred Pohl, Tom Disch, William Gibson, Michael Swanwick – who, in turn, compare Davidson to Collier, Kipling and Saki or (most appropriately) to G. K. Chesterton and who, in turn, recall the man. The man is to be seen through the stories, from the first to the last: playful and profound, with a masterful command of the English language.

"My Boy Friend's Name is Jello," for example. The narrator is unwell; his landlady, her sister care for him while – incidentally – suggesting that he find himself a wife; but... "in front of the house two little girls are playing one of those hand-clap games" ... and they – apparently by accident – save him. Pay attention lest you miss the point. "Was That the Squeal of an Angry Throat?" (sic) is equally oblique. "Or the sound of a hunting banth in the hills? Slave! My harness – and my sword!" (It is John Carter we recall.)

For a male writer to employ a female protagonist (or vice versa) is one of the more elementary exercises of the literary imagination. One of the ways in which literature routinely enriches life is by helping to educate the faculty of imaginative identification with others – the faculty of "putting ourselves in their shoes" – which is the bedrock of social life and personal relationships. There is, however, a sense in which that kind of identification is necessarily tentative; he who comes to believe that he has actual plumbed the depths of another's soul is probably over-reaching himself – and the male writer who aspires to render an accurate account not merely of a particular female character but of the very essence of the female condition can hardly avoid the suspicion that he might be biting off more than he can chew.

Sean Stewart's *Mockingbird* (Ace, \$21.95) has an acknowledgements section appended to the main text which expresses due gratitude to all the women in the author's life – including his wife and two daughters – but this only serves to re-emphasize

And "Full Chicken Richness" (1983) itself recalls Howard Waldrop's wondrous tale "The Ugly Chickens" (1980). Though, in truth, I wonder which came first: who is the true disciple?

Davidson was a leader in his field: witness how his oft-reprinted story "Or All the Seas With Oysters" (1958) bore the urban myth – used most recently by the late Frank Muir – that coat-hangers, when they grow up, become bicycles. There ought to be a school, After-Avram, but he spread himself too thinly; so savour every word. "Help! I am Morris Goldpepper," in which a dentist is abducted but sends back a message to the Earth on the dentures of the alien invaders. "The Woman Who Thought She Could Read," in which a woman who foretells the future by reading the beans foretells a death and is then blamed for causing that death – a tragedy recalled as a comedy. "Sacheverell," in which a talking ape is kidnapped and held to ransom... No; I'll not spoil your fun.

If anything, this collection ought to be longer. It draws a single story from two linked series, the first – "Polly Charms, the Sleeping Woman" – featuring Dr Eszterhazy, and the second – "Manatee Gal, Won't You Come Out Tonight" – Jack Limekiller. The complete Eszterhazy may be found in *The Adventures of Dr Eszterhazy* (1990) and is considered by many Davidson's masterpiece. The Limekiller stories –

including "Bloody Man" (*Fantastic*, August 1976) and "A Good Night's Sleep" (*F&SF*, August 1978) – also have their devotees but have yet to be reprinted. Eszterhazy inhabits Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania, fourth largest empire in Europe – late-19th-century Vienna, perhaps – but Limekiller lives (as, for a time, did Davidson) in the colony of British Hidalgo (Belize). Eszterhazy might, also, have been imagined by R. A. Lafferty (though Davidson is a more disciplined, more technically-gifted writer) but Limekiller is a unique creation.

No matter. Buy this book. It is aptly named: a treasure. And, if you see others by Avram Davidson, spend your beer money on them. He really is that good.

Also recommended: Short-story collections overlap to varying degrees with *The Avram Davidson Treasury*, with the exception of *The Adventures of Doctor Eszterhazy* (Philadelphia, Owlswick Press, 1990) a small-press publication that has yet to receive either a mass-market or a British edition. It must be highly recommended. His novels are all worth reading but I would make particular mention of *Masters of the Maze* (1965), *Rogue Dragon* (1965), *Clash of Star Kings* (1966), *The Island Under the Earth* (1969), *The Phoenix and the Mirror* (1969) and *Vergil in Averno* (1987).

Andrew Tidmarsh

heroine, Toni (i.e. Antoinette) Beauchamp, from the death of her mother to the birth of her child. Toni's relationship with her mother has always been confused by the fact that Elena Beauchamp was a witch, obtaining petty advantages in life – which she has always seemed to fritter away – by offering herself to a series of petty gods as a shell to be entered at their whim. These "Riders" are six in number, the male trio comprising the censorious Preacher, the sly Pierrot and the calculating Mr Copper, while the female trio comprise the stern Widow, the promiscuous Sugar and the versatile Mockingbird.

All through her life, Toni has watched her mother change as one Rider or another took possession of her, usually with destructive humiliating results. In the meantime, she has had to listen to countless murkily-allegorical fables about a Little Lost Girl whose attempts to find her way home in a strange parallel world are continually complicated and confounded by her encounters with the archetypal Riders.

Although it has always seemed to

The Female of the Species

Brian Stableford

that it is the product of extensive and careful research rather than actual experience. One could conceivably argue that the author's objectivity ought to count as an asset, allowing him a clearer view of the breadth and depth of the female condition than anyone trapped within it could possibly obtain, but there is a certain plausibility in the inevitable counter-argument that if you haven't been there, you can't possibly know it as well as those who have.

Mockingbird tracks the life of its



be her younger sister Candy (i.e. Candace) who has inherited her mother's talents it is Toni to whom Elena's epitaph – "There are some gifts which cannot be refused" – is actually addressed. Having been tricked into drinking a curse-laden draught of Mockingbird cordial, Toni falls victim to the Riders and has to negotiate her way through their myriad afflictions before she will be properly qualified to be a mother herself. She must take her mother's place as the Little Lost Girl whose only hope of redemption is to become a Mockingbird, past-mistress of all songs and slave of none. She has to learn the truth about birth, death, fate, luck, men, sex and self-sufficiency, taking advice and finding assistance wherever she can. This being a thoroughly American fantasy in the great feel-good tradition of Norman Vincent Peale and Dale Carnegie, she succeeds, the chief instrument of her success proving to be a quasi-miraculous talent for playing the commodities market. In fantasy, a woman can have it all – at least according to a man.

Although common wisdom considers emotional slushiness to be a female attribute it is worth noting that the kind of sentimentality contained in *Mockingbird* is nowadays mostly a male prerogative. Few post-feminist female writers can bring such a roseate glow and velvet touch to their contemplation of the existential predicament of the human female – but the very fact that the female of the literary species is nowadays far more sarcastic, more profoundly doom-laden and generally more deadly than the male has brought into being a population of new literary men deeply nostalgic for the lost glories of feminine niceness. I dare say that Sean Stewart's two daughters think that he is the neatest thing since sliced bread, and they will probably love this book – at least until they grow up. Once they are looking back at its patient admonitions and heartfelt reassurances from the other side of motherhood and divorce, however, they might conceivably begin to suspect that his oh-so-painstaking and stubbornly constructive analysis of their impending plight was just a teensy-weensy bit patronizing.

Miscellaneous Esoterica

Those of us who became addicted to science fiction in the dim and distant past, when it was a magazine-based genre whose transfer to the paperback medium was still in progress, still find it difficult to come to terms with the fact that its current popular manifestations have removed the printed word to the outer periphery of

concern. There are now "Science Fiction Shops" which contain no solid texts at all, being entirely devoted to the sale of comics, videos and the various kinds of plastic paraphernalia which constitute film and TV merchandising. Insofar as "science fiction" is recognized as a subject in British universities it is mainly featured in modules offered under the umbrella of Media Studies, where the focus is on films and TV. The academic histories of sf compiled by scholars of the printed word, which told a story ranging from Edgar Poe through Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs and "Doc" Smith, John W. Campbell's *Astounding* stable, Ray Bradbury, Philip K. Dick and Ursula K. Le Guin to the Cyberpunks, are gradually being displaced and replaced by the *Science Fiction* volume of the *Aurum Film Encyclopedia* and Roger Fulton's *Encyclopedia of TV Science Fiction*.

The inexorable process by which the visual media are establishing themselves at (indeed, as) the heart of contemporary culture has now progressed to the point of producing such works as *American Science Fiction Television Series of the 1950s* by Patrick Luciano and Gary Coville (McFarland, £43.50), whose authors have laboured valiantly to recover ever scrap of available information about those series which, having been broadcast live, vanished into the ether almost without trace. In the UK, of course, virtually everything broadcast before 1960 vanished entirely without trace (one of the few exceptions being the classic BBC production of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, whose repeat production – for which the entire cast had to be reassembled – was filmed for posterity). In the geographically-disadvantaged USA, however, even live broadcasts were often "kinescoped" for further transmission in areas unreachable by microwave relay or coaxial cable, and a few kinescopes survive even though the vast majority were returned to Eastman Kodak for recycling (at a salvage value of seven cents per pound). The USA also had Hollywood, where various TV producers began producing series on film, cannily anticipating the revenues which might one day flow from syndication.

For obvious reasons, Luciano and Coville give far more space to those filmed series whose episodes can still be seen – a full third of the text is taken up by the *Adventures of Superman* which are still being rerun in the US and the UK – but they have done their level best to recover whatever information can be recovered about such shows as *Atom Squad*, of

which not a single kinescope survives. Although its timespan does not extend as far as *The Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits* the book does cover the first three US "anthology series" which attempted, after the initial success of such juvenilia as *Captain Video and His Video Rangers* (1949-55) and *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet* (1950-55) to develop TV sf for adults. Unfortunately, no sponsor could be obtained for the experimental CBS show *Out There* (1951-52), whose twelve episodes included adaptations of three Robert Heinlein stories and one each by Theodore Sturgeon, Ray Bradbury and John D. MacDonald. Its ABC rival *Tales of Tomorrow* (1951-53) fared better, its 84 episodes being sponsored by Kreisler Watch Bands and C. H. Marsland & Sons, but soon switched from adaptations – which included works by Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Mary Shelley as well as stories by Julian May, William Tenn, Nelson Bond, John D. MacDonald and Henry Kuttner – to original scripts. Unfortunately, most of the scripts have vanished from human ken along with the kinescopes, so the credit information for these shows is very sparse indeed.

Judging by the quality of what survives, the unrecoverability of many of these shows can hardly be reckoned an aesthetic tragedy – not, at last, by comparison with the loss of almost all the upmarket drama produced in the early years of US TV, which was perfectly content to mimic theatre rather than the movies. It is, however, good to have this esoteric history sketched out insofar as it can be, and Luciano and Coville have done an excellent job in setting the record as straight as it can presently be set. They will, presumably, reap some critical acclaim by virtue of working on the edge of an academic field which is rapidly growing in fashionableness. No such reward is, alas, ever likely to come the way of the redoubtable Steve Sneyd, whose field of study – science-fiction poetry in magazines and fanzines – is never likely to make it onto the official curriculum. He is the braver man, and also – arguably, at least – the more valuable, in that his interesting work which would probably have been left forever undone had he not taken it on. His series of Data Dump booklets is one of very few handwritten fanzines to survive in the age of information technology, although its publisher also issues more handsomely-produced publications like *Ape into Pleiades: Poems* by Lilith Lorraine (Hilltop Press, 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield HD5 8PB, £2.75).

At a mere 6.3% of the price of



American Science Fiction Television Series of the 1950s – and in a limited edition of 150 copies – *Ape into Pleiades* is a more attractive proposition for the casual reader. It includes a short biography of Mary Wright, nee Dunn, alias Lilith Lorraine, and a sample of her poetry. Lorraine sold two interesting Utopian novelettes – both of which, somewhat atypically, promoted feminism and socialism – to Hugo Gernsback in 1929-30 before focusing her efforts on the production of visionary poetry; her work appeared in many of the sf pulps of the 1940s as well as from her own Avalon Press. The ten poems included here are various in style and content, several of them including imagery derived from the Lovecraft Mythos in a way that suggests the strong influence of Clark Ashton Smith, although their vocabulary is much less ornate

There is a good reason why people like halls of mirrors and mazes made of tall hedges. Getting lost, in these circumstances, is fun; it's a game. The fear we experience is only half-hearted, because there's only so far we can go; and regardless of how long we stumble around, one guessed turn will eventually lead to another... and we've reached the exit. Tom Holland's *The Sleeper in the Sands* (Little, Brown, £9.99) is a book that leads the reader through a number of chambers, rather than through a plot-maze, and given that its subject matter is tombs, curses and Egyptian history, this seems highly appropriate. (Structurally, there are similarities to Charles Nodier's *Smarra* [1821].) The reader interprets the hieroglyphics on this wall, but to comprehend them fully must move into the adjacent chamber, which is further from the entrance – and in the book, further back in time – and so on.

Using this dislocating, effective technique, we start in 1922 in the Valley of the Kings, with the archaeologist Howard Carter finally finding a stone staircase. It's protected by a curse: "...I heard it spoken, rising from the steps behind me, spoken by a voice as silver as the moonlight and as cold as when it shines upon the sand dunes of the desert. 'Leave for ever,' the voice whispered. 'You are damned.'" Among other things, Carter must discover "who Yuya might truly have been, and how it was – in direct contradiction of traditional royal custom – that his daughter Tyi had come to marry the Pharaoh." His tiny pet birds are messily destroyed, as a warning. Carter learns that the Mosque of al-Hakim holds "a secret... from the realms beyond death."

than is typical of the Lovecraft school. Although some – including the gracefully economical "Dark Science," which is perhaps the best of them – retain echoes of conventional pietism they also exhibit an admirable spirit of intellectual adventurism. Having long been an admirer of "In the 28th Century," which I read in *Wonder Stories Quarterly* more than 30 years ago (a long time after its publication) I am glad to have the book, and I hope it might be the prelude to a more substantial collection.

Now that TV, thanks to videotape, has become as durable as post-celluloid film, the advantage which the print medium had in being the very essence of history has largely disappeared. There is, however, still a creeping process of attrition which is snipping away at the heritage of the visual media. When yesterday's films

and TV shows are cut to accommodate the growth of the proportion of time given to advertising in every scheduled TV hour the bits excised are usually discarded, so that even the endlessly-syndicated shows are gradually shrinking. The advent of Digital Video Disc will doubtless help to stop the rot, but in the meantime, the maintenance of TV history remains a tricky business. It is not true to say that nothing is ever lost from the print medium, but most of it does hang around somewhere, relatively undiminished (as yet) by silverfish and acids in the paper. Those of us who are old enough to remember the days when print reigned supreme cannot regret this, and will always think more highly of the Steve Sneyds of this world than the Patrick Lucianos and Gary Covilles.

Brian Stableford

then on to *The Tale Told by the Christian Merchant*... Haroun's long narrative to the Caliph takes up a large portion of the book; but we are yanked back to the tomb entrance at the end, because Carter must react to what he's absorbed.

If perhaps the section involving Joseph continues too long, then that is a minor quibble. As with Holland's previous novels, the research has been thorough and this is a complex but rewarding puzzle; it's also a long way from the darkness of *Deliver Us From Evil* (1997). It embraces a different darkness altogether, and evokes the sweet (and not so sweet) winds of Egypt extremely well. But don't take your eyes off the symbols on the walls for a second!

Whether the young British writer Peter Kalu has ever read Frederik Pohl's *Black Star Rising* (1986) is anybody's guess; but he has certainly adopted that title for his third "sci-fi book" (as it is phrased in the brief jacket biography). The undercurrents of racial bigotry are also shared between the two. Kalu's *Black Star Rising* (The X Press, £6.99) sees five black astronauts travelling through space – and the fact that they are all black is rare: "The chances of it happening at random were 1 in 750,263." So why is it happening now? "You got told shit on this craft."

There's a mutiny when two of the crew take the ship through a black hole because the home of one of the mutineers has been destroyed. They survive, but Captain Mandella (unfortunately) starts "reducing them to robots... Turning the entire crew into efficient, low-cost, high conforming drones." She has one failed mission behind her and she doesn't want

Dangerous Chambers

David Mathew

Which leads us to chamber two, and a manuscript Carter copies, dated 1905. A misogynistic Caliph asks his manservant, Haroun, to "uncover the Secret Name of Allah." To do this we must move into chamber three, and *The Tale Told by the Sage of the Mountains of Kaf*. And

Tom Holland, author of *The Sleeper in the Sands*





another: "Command was never going to allow an all-black crew to be merely average." After an aborted assassination attempt on her life, she takes them to Thuli to deliver oxygen, but is troubled by memories of black angels singing. On Thuli there are some great lines: "Why would I suddenly ovulate – eight years after my menopause?" one character asks. "Upon deep orgasm, it can happen. I can give you that orgasm," is the charming response. Or: "How much more satisfying was a decent, in depth discussion of, say, lichen growth rates, than two minutes frantic wriggling?"

Later the captain answers a distress signal from a prison ship. A mass murderer, serving "life beyond life," becomes the crew's new headache – as does the racist computer. The reason for the crew being entirely black is later revealed: "They need black blood, live, fresh black blood, from which to cultivate the black gene and get the lymphocyte stocks up... to beat the virus missile."

Quite apart from the wealth of printing mistakes, there are several overwritten passages, some dodgy verbs ("Why wasn't I told?" venomous Kaya.) and the occasional poorly-worded formulation: "Kaya gave the captain the benefit of the doubt. She was after all the captain." But on the whole, it's a funny, exciting, welcome novel... From a personal point of view, I love reading fiction from countries and communities that are not my own. Whenever I travel anywhere, I try to find work in translation – to try to get a feel for a place, and to learn. Although I didn't feel much wiser after I'd finished this book, and although the ending didn't feel like one, *Black Star Rising* is warm and accomplished.

Julian Rathbone's *Trajectories* (Gollancz, £16.99) is accomplished too, in a different sense, but it's certainly not warm. It looks impressive (the packaging is perfection itself and there is not a single typographical flaw), the writing style is fine; but it comes across as cynical. Rathbone, the author of 29 novels, has turned his hand to a story in which a spoilt rock star, living in style in an enclave, has his life changed by the reappearance of his sister, who is a dancer in a travelling company. She has brought a diskette containing their father's ideas about the origins of the human race: that we came from the water.

The rock star, Richard, wants to complete the project, using both the most up-to-date techniques, and two teenaged girls, one of whom he lusts after (all rock stars, as we know, being pederasts). This young lady is

"living proof... that women are biologically so different from men that a Martian might find it difficult to believe they are the same species." And what's more, "Graceful and beautiful on land, she was a goddess in the water." (The more risqué descriptions I shall leave to your imagination.) The girl's mother works for a political party, and with the help of her daughter she is keeping an eye on Richard (who sings a Queen line at one point, for no reason).

We have all seen a phrase like this: *Science fiction for people who don't usually read science fiction*. The implication being that the work in question was intended to coax sf-non-believers into the light; that it won't be such a dangerous chamber to enter, not really. *Trajectories* might be sf for people who don't usually read sf – but it will have the reverse effect. Non-believers will be unlikely to read another word. Some of the writing is weak: referring to an information network Rathbone writes, "The image of a small spider in a large web comes to mind, and should not be rejected for its obviousness." Amidst the sophomoric stuff he has offered until now, this "image" would scarcely have been noticed, had it not been for that prissy disclaimer. While listening to the original commentary, one character actually bothers to ask, on behalf of the reader, "Is this boring, or not?" The answer is, "Depends where it's going. Stay with it." I could have gone one better: not boring. Annoying.

The sf "techniques" (such as they are) are conveyed by means of sarcastic extrapolation. Example: "Chair Booth of the National Executive Committee was shown boarding an old 757 at Blair International. She was on her way to Dublin for talks with Taoiseach Adams." That's clever, we are presumably expected to think: Cherie is now a powerful mover-shaker, and an airport's been named after Tony; but those pesky woes in Ireland have still not been fixed... About as subtle as a heart attack. Oh, and dope is legal, tobacco is not. There are mentions of sex toys, references to Joan Bakewell and Bon Jovi...

As professionally delivered as an Alan Parker movie, or an Annie Lennox song, it's as coldly distanced as the same. To be fair, I should add that once I had snapped through the barrier and reached the final 50 pages of *Trajectories*, I was keen to see how it would end; and I should also add that the ending was not what I had expected – although it is a shock finale that a better writer has used before, and possibly dozens of others have too. For all the faults of *Black Star Rising*, Peter Kalu's book is vastly superior –

with a pulse, with a soul.

Edited by Robert Silverberg, *Legends* (Voyager, £17.99) is a volume that deserves a thousand words of its own. Imagine how much money must have gone into this, given some of the contributors' near-legendary financial demands. In his introduction, Silverberg promises "eleven rich, robust new stories by the best known and most accomplished modern creators of fantasy fiction, each one set in the special universe of the imagination that made that writer famous throughout the world." He includes himself in the group, with a story from his Majipoor sequence. The reader can go back to Pern with Anne McCaffrey; revisit the Riftwar Saga with Raymond Feist; or see new instalments in Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, or George Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire*.

It's a big book. Personal favourites were Stephen King's "The Little Sisters of Eluria." Roland is attacked by zombie creatures in a dead-end town; wakes up trapped in a bed, being looked after by the eponymous sisters (shades of *Misery* here); all but one of the sisters are hags, and even the younger, mutinous, one isn't all she seems. In "Grinning Man" by Orson Scott Card a grumpy Davy Crockett grins a bear down from a tree to prove his superiority, but takes on more than he bargained for when he crosses Alvin Maker. Even when Alvin has found work, we can be sure that Davy is not out of the story. Ursula Le Guin's "Dragonfly" concerns a young woman who wants to know why only men qualify for the magic training in which she is interested – and she sets out to find the answers to her questions.

All of the authors featured have written a huge number of words about their fictional universes (especially Pratchett). For a reader new to fantasy to choose a series – an entire series – must be daunting. One of the reasons why *Legends* is good is that it will help such a reader decide. Every story is long, and will serve as an introduction to that author's work. Not everybody will agree with the choice of writers present; but this can be said about any anthology. However, it is interesting that Silverberg's cream of the crop are predominantly white male and predominantly American. It might well be true that many people experience the instinct to read only work from their own sex and race, but if so, it's a pity. It would seem to negate the very sense of adventure and imaginative freedom that the reading of fantasy should endorse.

Also noted:

Tad Williams's *River of Blue Fire* (Orbit, £16) is the second paving slab in his vast Otherland series – Otherland being the collective name for a high number of Virtual worlds that have been created by a very old, rich man. To summarize the first volume Williams spends six pages; to summarize the second, this reviewer has fewer than 400 words. Here goes. All of the main characters are lost in one VR

world or another, which range dramatically: from a prehistoric setting, to a Boy's Own version of Mars, to a *Wizard of Oz* deal, to a bog-standard kitchen (in which the players are tiny). It might be that every weird setting, or idea for a short story, that Williams ever had ends up in Otherland! Although the plot lurches between characters (some of whom started their lives before VR was around) and situations, the author keeps matters under control.

With *River of Blue Fire*, Tad Williams has done something amazing. Not only has he made the second volume of a vast sf epic enjoyable and exciting to a reviewer who has not read the first volume (many second volumes achieve this); he has also made the reviewer itch to read the third. There was a slow patch about 200 pages in, but the dozens of main characters and plots keep the interest going.

David Mathew

One strong aspect of fantasy – especially the heroic-action kind – is that of bravery, and it is brave of anyone, in the shadow of the multi-award-winning *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* edited by John Clute and John Grant (hereinafter called *FE*), to produce a volume called *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (hereinafter called *UltEF*), further subtitled *The Definitive Illustrated Guide* (Carlton Books, £19.99). But that is what our brave editor, David Pringle, has done as a follow-up to last year's *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. Since this book is scarcely a quarter the size of the *FE* in page count, and certainly less in wordage and coverage, it has to do something special to even consider the word *Ultimate* in its title, let alone "Definitive."

On first reading the book is neither of these things. Since the *FE* itself was not all-encompassing, this smaller volume has no chance to be, and the publisher's blurb works only because it emphasizes the word "Illustrated." That is this book's major attribute. The *FE* had no illustrations at all, and I'm not sure it would have benefited from them if that had meant a corresponding loss of text. Since *UltEF* starts with less text, it has to place its strength in the illustrations, and here it works fairly well. It is a nicely illustrated, picturesque book, full of many of the typical icons of fantasy that you would expect, plus a lot more besides. From the front cover, with its Merlin-esque robed wizard, swathed in runes, warriors, dragons and unicorns, to the back cover, with its movie still of Arnold Schwarzenegger as Conan, this book contains hundreds of illustrations. Unfortunately the majority of them are film stills. I do get annoyed when the history of a genre is reflected mostly in film images (as seems to happen with so many books about horror fiction). Thankfully this volume also contains some lesser-known pictures, such as Viktor Wasnezow's *Iwan auf Graven Wolf*,

Not Ultimate, Not Definitive, but...

Mike Ashley

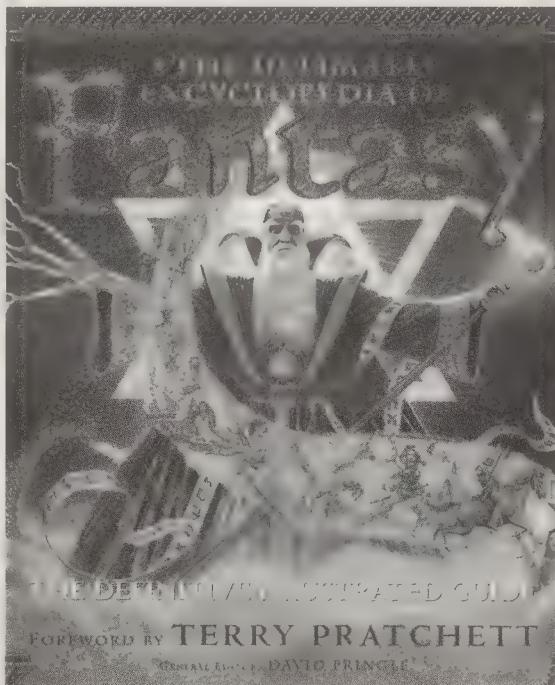
plus a profusion of book covers. It's welcoming to see a few magazine covers in here, and it would be rather nice if the reproduction of the covers from Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Fantasy Magazine* and *Realms of Fantasy* led to more enquiries about these titles and maybe even increased subscriptions. But one has to be realistic.

What is disappointing, though, is how few photographs there are of individual writers. The Who's Who section, which could have been liberally illustrated with photos of authors, contains only five – Hans Christian Andersen, Edgar Rice Burroughs,

Rudyard Kipling, C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. Instead this section is mostly illustrated with book covers, which I suspect was the publisher's idea in order to fill space in the cheapest possible way. The Picture Credits at the end of the book give virtually no credit to cover artists. For a book which relies heavily on artwork for its identity I would like to have seen far more in the way of fantasy art – there is so much superb work from Victorian and early Edwardian artists that could have been used and which would have contributed towards helping to define the genre.

I suspect that the artwork selection was not the province of editor David Pringle, and to judge the real value of the book we need to look more intensely at how he has assembled the volume, how he has marshalled the efforts of his three contributors – David Langford, Brian Stableford and Tim Dedopulos (the last, whose name may be less familiar than the others, is a fantasy-games expert) – and what he has brought to it that one cannot find easily in *FE*.

The book is divided into nine sections, plus a glossary of fantasy terminology. There is also a foreword by Terry Pratchett whose name is inevitably splashed across the cover in larger type than the editor's. If it sells more copies I'm sure no one will complain. The first section is an historical introduction to fantasy. Pringle takes us from its mythic fireside roots to the dawn of modern fantasy. He associates its modern growth with the advent of the Age of Storytelling, which ran from about 1880-1914, and here he identifies five key storytellers – Robert Louis Stevenson, H. Rider Haggard, Arthur Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling and H. G. Wells. Much of the second half of the introduction is given over to considering the work of Rider Haggard, a discussion which will be familiar to readers of recent issues of *Interzone*. I'm not wholly convinced by Pringle's argument. I suspect he's right that because of the popular-





REVIEWED

ity of these authors and their ubiquity on the bookstalls and in the magazines of the day they did much to popularize fantasy, in its broadest definition. It's certainly a better viewpoint than the more restricted origin theory put forward about 30 years ago by Lin Carter and L. Sprague de Camp that the fathers of modern fantasy were William Morris and Lord Dunsany. They were never as popular as Pringle's "Big Five," and their influence was more in the field of heroic-saga fantasy (for Morris) and mythographic fantasy (for Dunsany). Nevertheless their influence was still considerable and any list that omits their names must defend itself strongly. Pringle mentions both Morris and Dunsany in his introduction, but far too briefly, and I think he grossly understates the Victorian fascination for medievalism as promoted by the Pre-Raphaelites of which Morris was one and who were strongly influenced by Lord Tennyson and his fascination for the Arthurian legend. Both this strand of development of modern fantasy and the gothic strand which gave us the Victorian fairy tale, receives scant attention and Pringle misses a trick, I believe, in not developing these factors more in his introduction. The contribution to modern fantasy of such great Victorian writers as George Macdonald, Lucy Clifford, Juliana Ewing, Jean Ingelow and Charles Kingsley is sadly neglected.

He compensates for it to some degree in the second section which covers "Types of Fantasy" and here the Fairy Tale is properly accredited a section, albeit a brief one, which again overlooks most of the great Victorian writers. Nevertheless this section is a useful overview and helps to remind us of the scope of fantasy fiction, even though Pringle limits himself to nine categories including Animal Fantasy, Sword and Sorcery, Chinoiserie, Arabian Nights, Arthurian Fantasy and Humorous Fantasy. I'm a little puzzled as to why Gothic Fantasy, Nature Fantasy, Celtic Fantasy or Historical Fantasy are omitted, and, for that matter Surreal Fantasy or Magic Realism, even though Pringle makes his case for excluding the latter in his introduction, distinguishing between "fantasy" and "fabulation." It means that such noted fantasists as Franz Kafka, Patrick Suskind, Isabel Allende and Jorge Luis Borges are regrettably ignored.

The third section is the inevitable acknowledgement of the movie medium: "Fantasy Cinema." It presents short synopses of about 250

films in chronological order and is a useful quick-reference guide. Its parameters for inclusion seem broader than Pringle's definition of fantasy in that it includes straightforward ghost-story films like *The Ghost Goes West* or *Blithe Spirit* yet excludes such memorable films as Val Lewton's *Cat People*.

The fourth section is a very welcome one on Television Fantasy. This is a much underrated area – though not as underrated as Radio Fantasy and, though this is acknowledged, it is a shame there is not a similar section to cover some of the pioneer work of radio drama. This section covers over a hundred television films or series since 1946. Many of these I do not remember and regret that I missed. I'm pleased to see that the enigmatic *Northern Exposure* is given due consideration as one of the more original surreal TV experiments, though am puzzled as to why both *The Avengers* and *The Prisoner* series aren't accorded due status. [The reason is that they were in the previous volume, on science fiction – Editor.]

The fifth section is a Who's Who of important writers. Here the book could not attempt to compete with *FE* and I think Pringle has wisely made his choice selective, even if at times idiosyncratic. I'm not sure that Tom Arden or Sarah Ash or Rebecca Bradley or Jerry Carroll have yet earned an entry when others like Jorge Luis Borges, Lucy Clifford and Algernon Blackwood are ignored. My face reddened at discovering I had an entry, and whilst I'm delighted, would rather my space was given over to Thomas Ligotti or Vivian Vande Velde or maybe even Stephen King, the most surprising omission.

I thoroughly enjoyed the next section which is an A-Z of Fantasy Characters. Here we can learn who created such characters as Aslan or the Ancient Mariner or Elves and Dragons or the Jabberwock. This section will be a great help to newcomers who are aware of fantasy characters but know little about the field and may help them rediscover its pleasures. It's good to see the net spread wide to capture such characters as Iolanthe and Kai Lung and Cruella de Vil. One can always quibble, and it is a little surprising that Odysseus is included but not Hercules or Jason or, for that matter, Cthulhu. It's interesting to see that the character of Death was created by Terry Pratchett, though within the entry Pringle does explore earlier "origins"!

The last few sections are comparatively short but useful. They look at Fantasy Games, Fantasy Worlds

(which is extremely selective) and Fantasy Magazines (slightly less selective but omitting *Beyond* and *Twilight Zone* as two obvious titles). They do at least help round out the fantasy media and remind people that it isn't just all books and films.

What we have, as a result, is a book that despite being very selective nevertheless treats its subject seriously and sensibly and provides a more than adequate overview for those with a limited but cultivatable interest in fantasy. The book would better have been called *A Popular Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, because that is what it is, and within those limits it succeeds very well. It cuts its cloth in a totally different way to the *FE* and complements that volume well. I know there will be times when I shall refer to this book rather than the *FE* because it contains some new data (especially on television) and interesting opinion, and the more views we can have of fantasy the better.

Mike Ashley

To order a copy of *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Fantasy* at the special price of £18.99 (including post and packing) call Books by Post on 01624 675 137.

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The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Anthony, Piers. **Zombie Lover.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86690-9, 303pp, hardcover, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, £23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; the 22nd [we think] in the ever-more-juvenile-seeming "Xanth" series; this one has a cover which makes it look rather like an L. Frank Baum "Oz" book; are these novels still appearing in Britain from New English Library, or have they run their course in this country by now? – we wouldn't know, since Hodder/NEL rarely send us anything now.) 27th October 1998.

Anthony, Piers, and Julie Brady. **Dream a Little Dream.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86466-3, 301pp, hardcover, £23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; this is another of Anthony's reworkings of a raw first novel by an unknown writer; as with previous examples of the form, there are separate explanatory afterwords by the two authors.) January 1999.

Applegate, K. A. **The Android.** "Animorphs, 10." Scholastic/Hippo, 0-590-11295-3, 179pp, B-format paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997.) 21st October 1998.

Barker, Clive. **Galilee: A Romance.** "Epic, erotic, fantastic." HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-223560-9, 582pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1998; it's billed as "the first in a new two-part series.") 2nd November 1998.

Barnes, John. **Earth Made of Glass.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-466-8, 416pp, C-format paperback, £10.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1998; sequel to *A Million Open Doors*; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 133.) 2nd November 1998.

Bradbury, Ray. **Driving Blind.** Earthlight, ISBN 0-671-02207-5, 261pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £5.99. (Horror/fantasy/mainstream collection, first published in the USA, 1997; this is the first British edition; it contains 21 whimsical and fantastical stories, most of them original to the book – although it has been reported that a number of them were written long ago and rested in the author's bottom drawer for many years [despite which, the book has been widely praised]; reviewed by Peter Crowther in *Interzone* 127.) October 1998.

Bradbury, Ray. **Driving Blind: Stories.** Avon, ISBN 0-380-78960-4, 261pp, A-format paperback, £6.50. (Horror/fantasy/mainstream collection, first published in the USA, 1997; see the preceding entry for contents.) October 1998.

Bradbury, Ray. **The October Country.** Illustrated by Joe Mugnaini. Earthlight, ISBN 0-671-01791-8, 306pp, A-format paperback, cover by Trevor Scobie, £5.99. (Horror/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1955; containing 19 stories reprinted from *Weird Tales* and other magazines of the 1940s and early 1950s, this is one of Bradbury's finest collections; it incorporates revised versions of many of the stories from his first, long-out-of-print, volume *Dark Carnival* [Arkham House, 1947]; this reissue contains a four-page foreword by the author dated 1996.) October 1998.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer. **Heartlight.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86508-2, 416pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Horror/crime novel, first edition; proof copy received; this is the fourth in a new series by Bradley, described by the publishers as "fantasy-suspense," which we were unaware of until recently; the earlier volumes were *Witchlight*, *Ghostlight* [both 1996] and *Gravelight* [1997]; it seems that our statement of a year or two back – that Bradley wasn't writing much any more – was quite mistaken; however, there is an author's note thanking Rosemary Edghill, "who has been instrumental in preparing this manuscript [as well as those of the three previous books in this series] for publication" – which suggests that the enterprise is really a collaboration.) Late entry: September publication, received in October 1998.

Brown, Richard. **The Ghost Twin.** Hippo Ghost, 0-590-11236-8, 190pp, A-format paperback, cover by Sam Hadley, £3.50. (Juvenile horror novel, first edition.) 21st October 1998.

Bujold, Lois McMaster. **Komarr: A Miles Vorkosigan Adventure.** Earthlight, ISBN 0-671-01783-7, 311pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1998; this is probably the 10th Vorkosigan book, assuming that all Bujold's works belong to the series except for the novels *Ethan of Athos*, *Falling Free* and *The Spirit Ring*.) October 1998.

Czerneda, Julie E. **Beholder's Eye.** DAW, ISBN 0-88677-818-2, 413pp, A-format paperback, cover by Luis Royo, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; this big interstellar adventure story appears to be the second novel of a new American writer whose first book [also from DAW] had the rather odd-sounding title *A Thousand Words for Stranger*.) October 1998.

Daniel, Tony. **Earthling.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86661-5, 284pp, trade paperback, \$14.95. (Sf novel, first published in 1997; a second novel by the author of *Warpath* [1993], it's an expansion of his praised novella "The Robot's Twilight Companion"; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 128.) October 1998.

Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. **Black Swan, White Raven.** Avon, ISBN 0-380-78621-4, xi+366pp, trade paperback, cover by Thomas Canty, \$13. (Fairy-tale/fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1997; fourth in the series which began with *Snow White, Blood Red*; it contains all-new tales by Michael Blumlein, John Crowley, Karen Joy Fowler, Esther M. Friesner, Harvey Jacobs, Garry Kilworth, Nancy Kress, Pat Murphy, Joyce Carol Oates, Don Webb, Jane Yolen and others.) October 1998.

Di Filippo, Paul. **Lost Pages.** Four Walls Eight Windows [39 West 14th St., Room 503, New York, NY 10011, USA], ISBN 1-56858-099-1, 207pp, trade paperback, cover by Christine Francis, \$15.95. (Humorous sf/fantasy collection, first edition; distributed in the UK by Turnaround, Unit 3, Olympia Trading Estate, Coburg Rd., London N22 6TZ; the author's fourth collection, it contains an introduction [itself a fiction of sorts] and nine stories, one of them written in collaboration with Rudy Rucker; all deal in one way or another with the lives of "20th-century literary icons" [Michael Bishop's phrase, from the back cover]; three of the stories, "World Wars III," "The Happy Valley at the

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End of the World" and "Alice, Alfie, Ted and the Aliens," first appeared in *Interzone*; highly recommended; besides Bishop, Harlan Ellison and Barry Malzberg provide cover commendations, and Lucius Shepard is quoted on the accompanying review sheet, to this effect: "Paul Di Filippo's book overflows with outrage and the outrageous, all funded by the passionate and clear-eyed disrespect of a born iconoclast. *Lost Pages* reinfuses science fiction with its original antic energy – it might be the work of a contemporary Jonathan Swift.") 25th October 1998.

Dozois, Gardner, ed. **The Mammoth Book of Best New Science Fiction: 11th Annual Collection.** Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-599-X, lxvi+668pp, B-format paperback, cover by Phil Marratt, £8.99. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA as *The Year's Best Science Fiction: Fifteenth Annual Collection*, 1998; it contains stories by Stephen Baxter, Gregory Benford, Alan Brennert, Greg Egan [twice], Carolyn Ives Gilman, Simon Ings, Gwyneth Jones, James Patrick Kelley, John Kessel, Nancy Kress, Geoffrey A. Landis, Paul J. McAuley, Ian McDonald, Ian R. MacLeod, Robert Reed, Robert Silverberg, Brian Stableford, Michael Swanwick, Howard Waldrop, Sean Williams & Simon Brown, Walter Jon Williams and others; three of the stories are from *Interzone* – Egan's "Reasons to Be Cheerful," Peter F. Hamilton's novella "Escape Route" and Alastair Reynolds' "A Spy in Europa"; reviewed by Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh in *IZ* 136.) 29th October 1998.

Duncan, Dave. **Future Indefinite: Round Three of the Great Game.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-78131-X, xviii+476pp, A-format paperback, \$6.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997.) October 1998.

Evans, Hilary. **From Other Worlds: The Truth About Aliens, Abductions, UFOs and the Paranormal.** Carlton Books, ISBN 1-85868-514-



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1, 192pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Large-format, copiously-illustrated guide to flying saucers, etc, with many references to sf; first edition; Hilary Evans, who is male [born 1929], appears to be a scion of the Mary Evans family, proprietors of the famous Mary Evans Picture Library, and is author or editor of works such as *Practical Picture Research and Picture Researcher's Handbook*; he and a relative [brother? father?], Dik Evans, once compiled an illustrated anthology entitled *Beyond the Gaslight: Science in Popular Fiction 1895-1905* [Muller, 1976].) 26th October 1998.

Feist, Raymond E. **Shards of a Broken Crown.** "Volume Four of the Serpentwara Saga." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224655-4, 417pp, C-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £11.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1998.) 16th November 1998.

Friedman, C. S. **This Alien Shore.** DAW, ISBN 0-88677-798-4, 565pp, hardcover, cover by Michael Whelan, £23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; a big, romantic space opera by the woman writer hitherto best known for her first novel, *In Conquest Born* [1987]; in her two-page acknowledgments, she names Cordwainer Smith as an influence: "He is one of the most remarkable writers of the 20th century, and one of its most bizarre imaginative artists.") Late entry; September publication, received in October 1998.

Goodkind, Terry. **Temple of the Winds.** Millennium, ISBN 1-75281-678-0, 786pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Parkinson, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; it's "Book Four of *The Sword of Truth*," although the British publishers seem reluctant to tell us so; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 128; Millennium have also released new impressions of the first three volumes simultaneously with this one, all at £6.99 each: *Wizard's First Rule* [4th printing], *Stone of Tears* [3rd printing] and *Blood of the Fold* [second printing].) 5th October 1998.

Greenberg, Martin H., and Larry Segriff, eds. **Battle Magic.** DAW, ISBN 0-88677-820-4, 320pp, A-format paperback, cover by Les Edwards, £5.99. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; it contains all-new stories [except, possibly, for the Charles de Lint piece, which is not given a copyright date] by John DeChancie, Rosemary Edghill, Ed Gorman, Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Mickey Zucker Reichert, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Elizabeth Scarborough, Josephine Sherman, Lois Tilton and others; the volume is copyright "Tekno Books," which presumably is the name the Martin H. Greenberg mega-corporation now trades under [a sort of IBM of the sf field -- but not just sf/fantasy: it spreads across horror, mysteries, westerns, almost all of U.S. generic fiction]; Mr Greenberg has now become so ubiquitous that he seems like a force of nature: why have no interviews with him appeared anywhere [to our knowledge]?; why have there been no reviews or articles attacking him, in the way that another over-prolific anthologist, Roger Elwood, was attacked back in the 1970s?; we're not claiming that he deserves such attacks, but the silence which surrounds the "Greenberg phenomenon" seems faintly disturbing.) October 1998.

Haggard, H. Rider. **Ayesha: The Return of She.** "An outstanding classic by a world master!" Pulp Fictions [PO Box 144, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6NW], ISBN 1-902058-04-6, 301pp, B-format paperback, cover by Wiley

Dunsmore, £4.99. (Lost-race fantasy novel, first published in 1905; sequel to *She*.) October 1998.

Haggard, H. Rider. **She.** "An outstanding classic by a world master!" Pulp Fictions [PO Box 144, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6NW], ISBN 1-902058-03-8, 246pp, B-format paperback, cover by Wiley Dunsmore, £4.99. (Lost-race fantasy novel, first published in the USA as *She: A History of Adventure*, 1886 [and with a fuller text in the UK, 1887]; the text here follows a later, slightly revised, edition, probably from the 1890s; it also lops off the original "Editor's" introduction [i.e. Haggard's fictional editor's preamble] and replaces it with my review-essay "Was Rider Haggard a Pulpster?" from *Interzone* 135, which is probably appropriate enough in this publishing context, although the piece was not designed as an introduction to the novel -- David Pringle.) October 1998.

Haggard, H. Rider. **She and Allan.** "An outstanding classic by a world master!" Pulp Fictions [PO Box 144, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6NW], ISBN 1-902058-05-4, 290pp, B-format paperback, cover by Wiley Dunsmore, £4.99. (Lost-race fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1921; prequel to *She and Ayesha*, and also a crossover prequel to *King Solomon's Mines* and the other "Allan Quatermain" novels; it's good to see this old trilogy back in print in a cheap paperback format.) October 1998.

Haining, Peter, ed. **The Mammoth Book of Twentieth-Century Ghost Stories.** Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-536-1, xii+482pp, B-format paperback, cover by Gordon Crabb, £6.99. (Horror/ghost-story anthology, first edition; it contains reprint tales by Julian Barnes, Algernon Blackwood, James Hadley Chase, Agatha Christie, Mary Higgins Clark, Conan Doyle, Theodore Dreiser, Daphne du Maurier, Stella Gibbons, Winston Graham, Henry James, Pamela Hansford Johnson, Jack London, Arthur Machen, John Mortimer, Alfred Noyes, J. B. Priestley, Ruth Rendell, Stevie Smith, Muriel Spark, John Steinbeck, William Trevor, Edgar Wallace, Fay Weldon, H. G. Wells, P. G. Wodehouse and a few others; one has to hand it to Haining here: although in the past he sometimes has been guilty of recycling over-familiar material, in this book he seems to have gone out of his way to bring us remarkably obscure stories by some very famous people; an interesting selection, recommended.) 29th October 1998.

Halperin, James L. **The Truth Machine.** Pocket, ISBN 0-671-01040-9, vi+321pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; a debut novel by a new American writer which belongs to "mainstream sf" -- i.e. it's a serious-minded, futuristic utopian fiction aimed at the non-genre audience; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 118.) 15th October 1998.

Hamby, Barbara. **Icefalcon's Quest.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648303-8, 307pp, A-format paperback, cover by Kevin Jenkins, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1998; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 134.) 16th November 1998.

Hoffman, Nina Kiriki. **The Silent Strength of Stones.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-77760-6, 244pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1995; *Locus* is quoted, appropriately, to the effect that she works at "the blurry edge of fantasy and horror.") October 1998.

Di Filippo, Paul. **Ribofunk.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-73076-6, xii+241pp, A-format paperback,

\$3.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1996; it contains 13 loosely-affiliated stories about a hi-biotech future; two of them, "Distributed Mind" and "Big Eater," first appeared in *Interzone*; two others, "The Bad Splice" and "Blankie," are original to the book; the rest appeared in *F&SF*, *SF Age*, the anthology series *New Worlds* and *Universe*, and elsewhere; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 110; according to the non-pictorial front cover of this \$3.99 thrift edition, *Wired* magazine proclaimed it to be "the sci-fi book of the year"; so grab it now.) October 1998.

Holder, Nancy. **The Six Families: Gambler's Star, Book One.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-79312-1, 338pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; Holder is best known as a horror writer, but this one is about a casino on the Moon in a future where gambling is illegal everywhere on Earth.) October 1998.

Ings, Simon. **Headlong.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-647725-9, 325pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jacey, £5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; Ings's fourth novel, it's described as "mindbending science fiction for wired people" by "sf's hippest star.") 15th February 1999.

Jacobs, Harvey. **American Goliath: Inspired by the True, Incredible Events Surrounding the Mysterious Marvel Known to an Astonished World as The Cardiff Giant.** St Martin's Griffin, ISBN 0-312-19438-2, 346pp, trade paperback, \$14.95. (Historical fantasy [?] novel, first published in the USA, 1997; reviewed by Peter Crowther in *Interzone* 127 -- he liked it.) October 1998.

Jones, Stephen, and David Sutton, eds. **Dark Terrors 3: The Gollancz Book of Horror.** Vista, ISBN 0-575-60398-4, 381pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, £6.99. (Horror anthology, first published in 1997; it contains new stories by Poppy Z. Brite, Pat Cadigan, Storm Constantine, Dennis Etchison, Christopher Fowler, Neil Gaiman, Ray Garton, Brian Hodge, Julian Rathbone, Michael Marshall Smith, Melanie Tem, Mark Timlin and others, plus reprints of stories by Ray Bradbury and Ramsey Campbell; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 127.) 29th October 1998.

Jordan, Robert. **The Path of Daggers: Book Eight of The Wheel of Time.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-554-1, 604pp, hardcover, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; this, which is more or less simultaneous with the U.S. edition, has shot straight to the top of the UK hardcover fiction bestsellers, promoting another chorus of "Robert Who?" from mainstream commentators; face it, guys, this obscure American ex-soldier who used to specialize in "Conan" pastiches is now one of the biggest sellers, leaving even our beloved Saint Pratchett in the dust: people seem to like his stuff.) 29th October 1998.

Jordan, Robert. **The Path of Daggers.** "Book Eight of The Wheel of Time." Tor, ISBN 0-312-85769-1, 605pp, hardcover, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, \$27.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1998.) 1st November 1998.

King, Gabriel. **The Golden Cat.** Century, ISBN 0-7126-7890-5, 350pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Animal fantasy novel, first edition; a follow-up to last year's *The Wild Road*; "Gabriel King" is a

joint pseudonym for Jane Johnson [sf and fantasy editor at HarperCollins UK] and M. John Harrison [eminent novelist].) 19th November 1998.

King, Gabriel. **The Golden Cat**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-924422-5, 350pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Animal fantasy novel, first published in 1998; this mass-market edition is due to be issued less than two months after the hardcover [above] – the review copies were sent out almost simultaneously.) 7th January 1999.

Lackey, Mercedes, and Larry Dixon. **Owlflight**. Illustrated by Dixon. DAW, ISBN 0-88677-804-2, 342pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jody A. Lee, \$6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; it appears to be the beginning of the latest sub-trilogy in the "Heralds of Valdemar" series.) October 1998.

Lackey, Mercedes, and Larry Dixon. **Owlflight**. Illustrated by Dixon. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-543-5, 293pp, C-format paperback, cover by John Barber, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) Late entry: 21st September publication, received in October 1998.

Lackey, Mercedes, and Larry Dixon. **Owlflight**. Illustrated by Dixon. DAW, ISBN 0-88677-802-6, 389pp, hardcover, cover by Jody A. Lee, \$24.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; sequel to *Owlflight*.) October 1998.

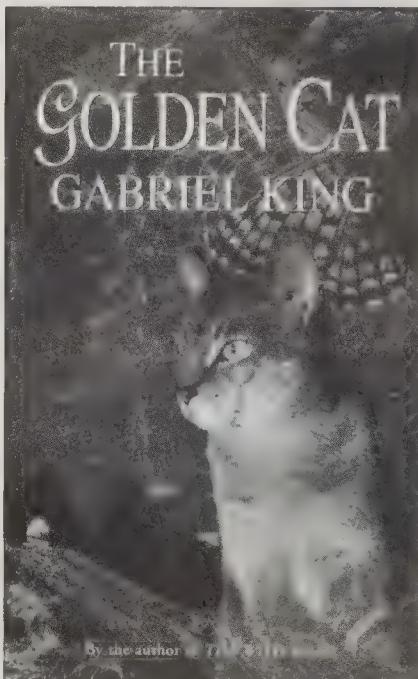
McCaffrey, Anne. **If Wishes Were Horses**. Roc, ISBN 0-451-45642-4, 85pp, hardcover, cover by Harvey Parker, \$14.95. (Fantasy novella, first edition; this is a miniature hardcover edition of what is, in effect, a longish short story.) October 1998.

McCarten, Anthony. **Spinners: A Novel**. Morrow, ISBN 0-688-16303-3, 262pp, hardcover, \$24. ("Literary gothic," possibly sf, or "delusional sf" novel [a girl gets impregnated by space aliens, but do they really exist?]; first edition [?]; proof copy received; a debut novel by a New Zealand playwright, film-maker and short-story writer; born 1961, it's described as "Twin Peaks meets Nathaniel Hawthorne" and is aimed at the mainstream; there may be a preceding British [or New Zealand] edition, but we'll probably never know since UK publishers usually don't think to send us this kind of thing.) February 1999.

McKiernan, Dennis L. **Into the Fire: Hel's Crucible, Book 2**. Roc, ISBN 0-451-45701-3, xv+471pp, hardcover, cover by Ciruelo Cabral, \$23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; the concluding part of a "duology" which began with *Into the Forge*; it appears to be cutesy, sub-Tolkien quest-fantasy; the author is older than one might have expected; his brief afterword begins, "I was born April 4, 1932... in the depths of the Great Depression," and goes on to credit Edmond Hamilton, principal author of the 1940s hero-pulp *Captain Future*, as his formative childhood influence.) Late entry: September publication, received in October 1998.

McKiernan, Dennis L. **Into the Forge: Hel's Crucible, Book 1**. Roc, ISBN 0-451-45700-5, x+410pp, A-format paperback, cover by Ciruelo Cabral, \$6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997.) Late entry: September publication, received in October 1998.

Michaels, Melisa. **Sister to the Rain**. Roc, ISBN 0-451-45730-7, 320pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Fantasy/crime novel, first edition; the



author, although we don't recall seeing any of her books before, has written at least six previous novels; this one seems to be a kind of "elpunk," involving a woman private eye who investigates a crime in a present-day community of California elves; talk about genre-mixing!) October 1998.

Miéville, China. **King Rat**. Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-73881-0, 333pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Horror novel, first edition; a debut book by a 25-year-old British writer whose distinctive name we recognize from the *Interzone* subscription list; described as "urban gothic," it's set in London, where the author "has always lived"; China Miéville, born circa 1973, who has written and illustrated for small-press publications, is no doubt too young to know or care, but *King Rat* was, of course, the title of a bestselling 1960s novel by James Clavell, which was filmed.) 6th November 1998.

Moon, Elizabeth. **Oath of Gold: The Deed of Paksenarrion, Book III**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-691-2, 501pp, A-format paperback, cover by Kevin Davies, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 5th November 1998.

O'Leary, Patrick. **The Gift**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86403-5, 286pp, trade paperback, cover by Thomas Canty, \$13.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1997; the author's second novel, following his science-fictional debut with the well-received *Door Number Three* [1995]; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 128.) October 1998.

Pickover, Clifford A. **Time: A Traveler's Guide**. Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-512042-6, xviii+285pp, hardcover, no UK price shown [\$20 USA]. (Popular science text, first published in the USA, 1998; a well-informed, illustrated guide to time in all its aspects, it contains numerous references to sf; much of it is written in a semi-fictional dialogue form, like certain works of proto-sf in the 17th century; Martin Gardner, Ian Stewart and others commend it on the back cover; this is the American OUP first edition now released in Britain, although the publishers have neglected to tell us the UK price or date.) No date shown: received in October 1998.

Pierce, Tamora. **The Magic in the Weaving: Circle of Magic, 1**. Scholastic Press, 0-590-54221-4, 215pp, B-format paperback, £5.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in the USA as *Circle of Magic: Sandry's Book*, 1997.) 21st October 1998.

Pinto, Ricardo. **The Chosen: Book One of The Stone Dance of the Chameleon Trilogy**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-04171-2, 496pp, hardcover, cover by Jim Burns, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; yet another completely unknown writer gets the Big Commercial Fantasy treatment, "backed by a dramatic campaign" with "stunning point of sale material," "national press advertising," etc [in the hope, presumably, that he will turn out to be another Robert Jordan]; the Portuguese-born Scottish author is a graduate of Dundee University and has worked in computing; apparently, he has laboured 12 years on this trilogy; let's hope that Tolkien-like dedication will bring him a merited success.) 14th January 1999.

Pollack, Rachel. **Burning Sky**. Introduction by Samuel R. Delany. Cambrian Publications [PO Box 112170, Campbell, CA 95011-2170, USA], ISBN 1-878914-04-9, xii+409pp, hardcover, cover by Paula J. McCreary, no US price shown [£22.95 post-paid in the UK, from Chris Reed, BBR, PO Box 625, Sheffield S1 3GY]. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; it is limited to 300 signed and numbered copies, plus a few presentation copies [of which this is one]; despite its short print-run, this is a very handsomely-produced book of 27 stories, each with an author's afterword; four of the stories first appeared in *Interzone* or its associated anthologies – "Angel Baby," "The Bead Woman," "The Malignant One" and "The Protector"; even if you have those, the volume is worth getting for all the rest: unusual, imaginative work, recommended.) No date shown: received in October 1998.

Pratchett, Terry. **Death Trilogy: Mort, Reaper Man, Soul Music**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06584-2, 754pp, hardcover, cover by Josh Kirby, £15.99. (Humorous fantasy omnibus, first edition; the three novels, all in the celebrated "Discworld" series, were first published in 1987, 1991 and 1994; three of Pratchett's best, and a bargain.) 29th October 1998.

Pratchett, Terry. **Jingo**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14598-X, 414pp, A-format paperback, cover by Josh Kirby, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1997; the 21st "Discworld" novel; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 126.) 5th November 1998.

Rohan, Michael Scott. **The Castle of the Winds: A Winter of the World Novel**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-570-3, vii+454pp, A-format paperback, cover by Ian Miller, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a belated sequel to Rohan's earlier "Winter of the World" trilogy [1986-1988]; the book is dedicated [with a three-page tribute] to the late editor, Richard Evans [1950-1996], who was instrumental in the career of this author among many others.) 5th November 1998.

Russell, Mary Doria. **Children of God**. Black Swan, ISBN 0-552-99811-7, 510pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1998; proof copy received; sequel to *The Sparrow*, which won the Arthur C. Clarke Award for the best sf novel of 1997; see the interview with the author which we ran in *Interzone* 134.) 11th February 1999.



Salvatore, R. A. **Luthien's Gamble**. "Book 2 of *The Crimson Shadow*." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648344-5, 291pp, A-format paperback, cover by Harvey Parker, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996.) 2nd November 1998.

Sinclair, Alison. **Legacies**. Millennium, 0-75281-707-8, 419pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1995; second printing; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 97; the publishers have also reissued Sinclair's second novel, *Blueheart* [1996], together with this one [price £5.99], although there is nothing on the latter book itself to indicate that it's actually a second printing.) 5th October 1998.

Stine, R. L. **Cry of the Cat**. "Goosebumps Series 2000, 1." Hippo, 0-590-11310-0, 118pp, B-format paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile horror novel, first published in the USA, 1998.) 21st October 1998.

Tepper, Sheri S. **The Family Tree**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-651016-7, 492pp, A-format paper-

back, £6.99. (Sf/fantasy novel; first published in the USA, 1997.) 16th November 1998.

Thomsen, Brian, and Martin H. Greenberg, eds. **The Reel Stuff**. DAW, ISBN 0-88677-817-4, 383pp, A-format paperback, cover by Les Edwards, \$5.99. (Sf anthology, first edition; it contains eleven reprint stories upon which sf films [or TV movies] have been based, most of them well-known – e.g. "Johnny Mnemonic" by William Gibson, "Enemy Mine" by Barry Longyear, "Sandkings" by George R. R. Martin and "Air Raid" by John Varley.) Late entry: September publication, received in October 1998.

Waitman, Katie. **The Divided**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-41437-3, 360pp, trade paperback, \$12.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a second novel by a new American writer [her name is given as Katharine L. Waitman in the copyright statement] whose first, *The Merro Tree* [1997], was reviewed favourably by David Mathew in *Interzone* 133.) February 1999.

West, Michelle. **The Uncrowned King: The Sun Sword, Book Two**. DAW, ISBN 0-88677-801-8, 687pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jody Lee, \$6.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; this is by an author we haven't heard of before, though it appears to be her fourth novel; the copyright statement names her as Michelle Sagara, so we've looked her up; it turns out that "Michelle West" is a pseudonym for Michelle Michiko Sagara, born 1963, author of *Into the Dark Lands* [Del Rey, 1991] and other books; at a glance [which may be unfair], this new book is standard heroic fantasy, written in the standard latter-day style – too many verbless sentences, to many one-sentence paragraphs.) Late entry: September publication, received in October 1998.

Wooding, Chris. **Catchman**. "Point Horror Unleashed." Scholastic, 0-590-11321-6, 196pp, A-format paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile horror novel, first edition.) 21st October 1998.

Craven [born 1939], who is best known for his *Nightmare on Elm Street* series; first edition; again, a specialist item, but one which will be invaluable to those with a particular interest in the subject.) December 1998.

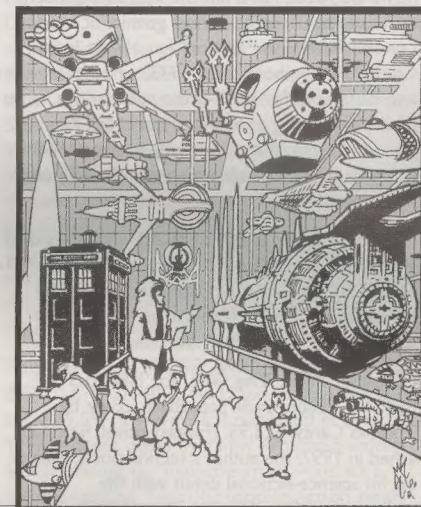
Weaver, Tom. **Science Fiction and Fantasy Film Flashbacks: Conversations with 24 Actors, Writers, Producers and Directors from the Golden Age**. McFarland, ISBN 0-7864-0564-3, vii+351pp, hardcover, £34.65. (Illustrated collection of interviews with sf/fantasy film directors, actors and other personnel; this is the American first edition of November 1998 with a British price added; as with the prolific Weaver's five earlier collections, much of the material is reprinted from *Starlog* and *Fangoria*; interviewees include Lewis Allen, John Badham, Alan Caillou, Edward Dmytryk, Paul Mantee, Debra Paget and at least a dozen others; we listed this item last month as a US publication, but it has now been made available in the UK from Shelwing Ltd, 4 Pleydell Gdns., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2DN.) 21st January 1999.

Williamson, Chet. **Clash by Night**. "The Crow." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648366-6, 335pp, A-format paperback, cover by Cliff Nielsen, £5.99. (Horror movie-and-comic-book spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1998; it's "inspired by the series created by James O'Barr," and is copyrighted "Edward R. Pressman Film Corporation"; third in a series of which other titles are by David Bischoff and Poppy Z. Brite; the last stanza of Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" is quoted in running epigraphs throughout; the novel's title comes from there, as do the titles of Lawrence O'Donnell [Henry Kuttner's] "Clash by Night" [1943], Ben Bova's *As on a Darkling Plain* [1972], Richard Bowker's *Dover Beach* [1987], Jack Yeovil [Kim Newman's] "Ignorant Armies" [1990], etc., etc.) 2nd November 1998.

Zahn, Timothy. **Vision of the Future**. "Star Wars." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-04338-3, 520pp, hardcover, cover by Drew Struzan, £12.99. (Sf movie-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1998; sequel to *Specter of the Past* [1997] in the two-volume sub-series known as "The Hand of Thrawn"; this must be the biggest *Star Wars* spinoff yet – over 500 pages of fairly small print; pulp space opera lives!) December 1998.

Spinoffery

This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.



McConnell, Ashley. **Stargate SG-1**. Roc, ISBN 0-451-45725-0, 202pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf TV-series novelization, first edition; it's based on a script by Jonathan Glassner and Brad Wright for a new MGM TV series which in turn is based on the feature film *StarGate* "created by" Dean Devlin and Roland Emmerich.) October 1998.

Muir, John Kenneth. **Wes Craven: The Art of Horror**. McFarland [Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640, USA], ISBN 0-7864-0435-3, viii+280pp, hardcover, \$45. (Lightly illustrated A-to-Z, with detailed credits and critiques, of 1960s horror-sf-fantasy movies from the Italian studios; first edition; a bit of a specialist item, this, but yesteryear's Italian cinematic schlock seems to be trendy, so no doubt this thorough study will find an audience.) December 1998.

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